Morning Thoughts for Every Day in the Year

J. R. Miller, D.D.

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Morning Thoughts

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YOUNG MEN; FAULTS AND IDEALS

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Morning Thoughts

For Every Day in the Year

BY

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"MAKING THE MOST OF LIFE," ETC.

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PREFACE

NOTHING is more helpful in Christian living than the habit of getting a verse or phrase of Scripture into the mind and heart in the morning. Its influence stays through all the day, weaving itself into all the day's thoughts and words and experiences. It is to help in this practical way that this little book has been prepared. For each morning of the year a word of Scripture is set down, with a brief meditation which may help to fix it in mind and suggest its application to the life of the day. No definite order has been followed in the arrangement of these meditations. "Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable."

J. R. M.

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Morning Thoughts

JANUARY 1

In the beginning God.—GEN. i. 1.

EVERYTHING should begin with God. His should be the first voice we hear each morning, calling us to awake and set forth on the day's journey.

We should begin each new year with God. We write in all our dates, A.D., Anno Domini, the year of our Lord. If these are years of our Lord, we should make them really such. It is not enough to write Christ's name on the years; we should make sure that He is in all the year's life—its business, its pleasures, its friendships, its work and play. To start the year with God will give us a heavenly impulse which will make the whole year mean more to us. One wrote at New Year: "I wish you a vision of God that shall make you eager to guide others to the place of vision; a vision of yourself that shall give you charity for the weakness of others; a vision of others that shall reveal their virtues more than their faults; a vision of life that shall make you eager to work, willing to endure, patient in waiting, a master of self and a servant of all."

Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee.—DEUT. viii. 2.

MEMORY is a wonderful power. It is a storehouse in which we keep the records of the experiences of our lives. An angel, with invisible ink, writes on a scroll the story of all our days, the things we do, the things of our thoughts. We make our memories for ourselves, writing our own records.

The children are told that the murmuring they hear when they hold a shell to their ears is the echo of the sea's moaning and roar, hiding away in the shell's chambers from the days when it lay on the shore. The music we hear in our hearts, as life goes on, is the treasured echoes of our own life in the days that are gone. The practical suggestion from this is that if we would make our life-music sweet and harmonious, we must live beautifully, purely, unselfishly, helpfully. Sins of youth make bitter memories for after-years. The secret of a happy old age is a well-watched life from childhood. Any unguarded hour may leave a memory which will sadden all the after-years.

JANUARY 3

Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before.—PHIL. iii. 13.

WE ought not to live in the past. No matter how full of blessing and good it is, we may not stay in it. Life is before us, never behind us. If we linger, we shall lose our place, and our fellows will press on and leave us.

The best way to live for to-morrow is to do well the work of to-day; yet the future should always exert an inspiring influence upon us. In the time of discouragement it is the hope of overcoming that brings cheer.

When we are in sorrow it is the promise of comfort that sustains us. In the task-work of school days it is the thought of what manhood will bring of achievement that inspires the student. In the struggles of earthly life it is the larger life of heaven that keeps the heart brave and strong.

We should let the past go, with all it contains of memory and of good, while we turn ever to the future, with hope and courage.

JANUARY 4

Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass.—PSALM XXXVII. 5.

OUR affairs are forever getting tangled, like threads in a child's hands, and we cannot straighten out the tangles ourselves. We cannot see how anything beautiful or good can come out of our poor living or our feeble striving. Our days are full of disappointments, and our night's rest is broken by anxieties. Yet it is the Christian's privilege to commit all his life's tangles into the hands of Jesus Christ. He can take our broken things and build them up into beauty.

One of the finest windows in a great cathedral is said to have been made out of the fragments of broken glass which the workmen had thrown away as worthless. A skilful hand gathered them up and wrought them into lovely form. Christ can take our failures, our mistakes, our follies, our fragments of living, even our sins, and make them into beautiful life and character.

I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee.—Isa. xli. 13.

AS a father holds the hand of his little child when it walks, so God holds the hand of His children while they walk in the world's ways. God is ever walking alongside of us. We cannot fail if God is holding our hand. William Canton writes:

"Hold Thou my hands!
In grief and joy, in hope and fear,
Lord, let me feel that Thou art near:
Hold Thou my hands!

"If e'er by doubts
Of Thy good Fatherhood depressed,
I cannot find in Thee my rest,
Hold Thou my hands!

"Hold Thou my hands—
These passionate hands, too quick to smite,
These hands so eager for delight,—
Hold Thou my hands!

"And when at length,
With darkened eyes and fingers cold,
I seek some last loved hand to hold,
Hold Thou my hands!"

JANUARY 6

Because thou . . . hast not asked for thyself long life: neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies.—1 KINGS iii. 11.

IT is interesting to notice the things God was pleased that Solomon had not chosen. One was long life. Long life is not the most desirable thing among God's gifts. The completest life ever lived on this earth was only three and thirty years in length.

Riches was another thing Solomon had not chosen. No doubt, if the choice were offered, many would choose money before all things else. There is a Russian legend of one who entered a diamond-mine in search of riches. He filled his pockets with gems, and then, as he went on, threw them away to make room for the larger gems he found. At length he became thirsty, but there was no water. He heard the flow of rivers, but when he came to them they were rivers of gems. At what seemed the sound of a waterfall, he hastened forward, only to find a cascade of diamonds. With all this wealth round him, he was dying of thirst.

JANUARY 7

Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.—PROV. iv. 23.

EVERY one carries in himself the elements of his own happiness or wretchedness. It is the heart that gives color to our skies and tone to the music we hear. A badly kept heart makes pain for the life. A well-lived life stores away memories which make celestial music to cheer the declining years.

Norman McLeod said: "Nothing makes a man so contented as an experience gathered from a well-watched past." We can insure full happiness only by living no day whose memory will make us ashamed or give us pain, when we sit in the eventide and recall it.

The time to secure a "well-watched past" is while the early days of life are fleeting. We never can change any yesterday. An unholy life yields a harvest of wretchedness in old age. But a life of obedience to God, of faithfulness to duty, of personal purity and uprightness, and of unselfish, Christ-like service, will make old age like a garden of fruit and flowers.

JANUARY 8

Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.—Col. iii. 17.

OUR common work has a great influence in shaping our character. One whose business it is to inspect the work of others, watching mercilessly for errors or flaws, needs to guard himself sedulously, or the critical spirit, so important in his work, will find its way into all his life.

A lady once said to Hogarth that she wished to learn to draw caricature.

"Alas! it is not a faculty to be envied," replied the great master of the art.

"Take my advice, and never draw caricature. By the long practice of it I have lost the enjoyment of beauty. I never see a face but distorted, and never have the satisfaction to behold the human face divine."

A similar word of caution is needed by all of us, lest our daily occupation and habit influence us in our way of looking at the lives about us. The way to escape the danger is to be full of unjudging love.

The ark of the Lord continued in the house of Obed-edom . . . : and the Lord blessed Obed-edom, and all his household.—2 SAM. vi. 11.

THE same ark which wrought disaster when irreverently touched now brought blessing to a home in which it was received with love. This fragment of history from the olden days suggests to us the blessing of true religion in a home.

Some people think it would be a loss and a hindrance to receive Christ into a house. It would stop some pleasures. It would drive out some amusements. It would interfere with some ambitions. But those who open their doors to Christ will always be rewarded. Religion blesses a home. It sweetens the home life, enriches the home affections, deepens the home joys, lightens and comforts the home sorrows. It brings true prosperity, for the blessing of the Lord maketh rich. It brings protection, for the angel of the Lord encamps round about them that fear Him. It opens a door between the earthly home and the heavenly, and God's angels come and go in gentle ministries.

A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.—Prov. xxv. 11.

IT is well to form the habit of saying kindly things. Sincere words of commendation help all true men and women to live more worthily and to achieve better things. They should be spoken, too, while people live. Kind words come too late when they are held back till death has closed the ears and chilled the heart, when words cannot avail to comfort or help.

Too many people speak the wrong words, too—words that hurt, that fall on sensitive feelings like frost on the flowers. They thoughtlessly allude to matters which are of painful interest. They stir up sad or bitter memories in those who are trying to forget them. They lack the tact which always turns conversation into pleasant channels.

We should all learn the art of pleasant speech. It is not a matter of elocution or grammar—it is a matter of heart culture. Love must be the inspirer, and there must be the grace of thoughtfulness in word and tone.

The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.—PROV. iv. 18.

CHRISTIAN old age should be beautiful. It should have the mellowness of autumn, after the heat and toil of summer. Youth has its beauty, and so has manhood, but there is a loveliness in good old age which is more winning than aught in any other period of life.

"*There is a beauty Youth can never know,*
With all the lusty radiance of his prime,
A beauty the sole heritage of time,
That gilds the fabric with a sunset glow,
That glorifies the work it soon lays low!
There is a charm in age, well-nigh sublime
That lends new lustre to the poet's rhyme,
As mountain peaks are grander crowned with snow.
How gay the laugh of Youth! but, oh, how brave
The stately weakness of a reverend Age!"

The merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver.—PROV. iii. 14.

THERE is something that gives better returns than silver or gold in the world's markets. It is better to be wise than to be rich. A proper use of wisdom yields larger and better gains than the best use of money. Wisdom increases continually in the life of him who possesses it.

Take the wisdom of trusting God, and how experience enlarges it! The timid faith of to-day becomes the heroic confidence of to-morrow.

Or take the wisdom of loving others. Only begin it and practice it, and your heart will expand and your hand will acquire new skill in ministering. Many a young person with only a commonplace life, by simply beginning in a small way to help others and do good, has at length attained a measure of helpfulness that is simply amazing.

A sailor boy brought home to his mother a little flower from some foreign land, and all the fuchsias in England are the harvest from that little kindness.

What good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?—MATT. xix. 16.

THIS young man had lived a good life. He stood high in the Church and among his neighbors. Then he came to Christ with eagerness, and Jesus, when He saw him, loved him. But his money was his idol.

One Sunday morning a minister found on his pulpit a note reading, "The prayers of this congregation are desired for a man who is growing rich." There is no time when men really need more that their friends should pray for their souls, than when they are growing rich. Yet if the young ruler had used his money as the Master bade him to do, it would have done good to the poor, it would have become treasure laid up in heaven for the man, and Jesus would have had another follower. The disciples of Jesus used their money so as to make it a blessing. They left all for the sake of their Master. Jesus said: "Every one that hath left houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or children, or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and shall inherit eternal life."

JANUARY 14

The Lord hath need of them.—MATT. xxi. 3.

WHATEVER of ours Jesus asks the use of we should give Him without question. He often wants to use money of ours in His work, and we should never refuse His request. He asks for the use of a book of ours which He wants to have sent to one of His hungry-hearted little ones, who needs just that book. The other day a reclining-chair which had stood unused in a home for two years, since grandmother died, was brought out and sent to a sick man who needed it.

The true temples of God are human hearts in which God would make His home. But sometimes there is no room for Him. In the Temple at Jerusalem Jesus found men doing things that desecrated the place, and He drove them out. He comes to us and would drive out of our hearts everything that defileth.

Jesus was disappointed that morning on His way to Jerusalem when, hungry, He went to the fig-tree for food. Is He ever disappointed when He comes to us hungry?

JANUARY 15

Bring him hither to Me.—MATT. xvii. 17.

VISIONS are given to prepare for tasks. At the foot of the Transfiguration Mount a father was waiting with his distressed boy to have him healed. While we are sitting in rapture at the Lord's Supper somebody is outside with a great need. We do not know how often we fail to help those in need or trouble because we have not enough faith. Jesus is the strong Son of God, and there is nothing He cannot do.

We ought to make the most we can of our life and do all the good we can. It is wrong for any of us, with our splendid abilities, to stay in "contented insignificance." The Master wants us to be great and to do great things. But there are mistaken opinions about what it is to be great. Jesus' disciples thought if they held high positions in the world they would be great. Jesus told them that childlikeness was the highest greatness. We are greatest when we are not aware of being great at all. Simplicity, trust, the absence of ambition, contentment —these are marks of greatness.

Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?—MATT. xviii. 21.

THE Christian way, if one has done us an injury, is to go to him in the spirit of love and talk the matter over with him. Perhaps it is all a misunderstanding, needing only a word of explanation. We are probably as much to blame as the other person is when things go wrong between us and a neighbor.

> "*There is so much bad in the best of us,*
> *And so much good in the worst of us,*
> *That it hardly behooves any of us*
> *To talk about the rest of us.*"

Our forgiving is to be unlimited. The rabbis taught that no one should forgive another more than three times. Peter thought he was making the limit great enough when he suggested that the Master's followers should forgive seven times. But Jesus swept away all counting of times, and said a Christian should forgive seventy times seven times.

I have compassion on the multitude.—MATT. xv. 32.

NO sickness could continue in Christ's presence. From far and near people came with their friends and neighbors—the blind, the lame, the dumb, and not one went away unhealed. Jesus is still the fountain of healing. He uses physicians and means, but He is always the Healer.

Jesus thought not only of people's spiritual needs, but also of their physical wants. The multitude had been three days with Him in the desert, where they could not buy food, and were very hungry. Jesus showed consideration for them — He could not send them away fasting. He did not create food enough to feed four thousand hungry men, but took what they had already and, blessing it, made it enough to supply all their want. We must do what we can, and then God will come and we shall be cared for. We should watch against the influence of wrong teaching. If we let the words of Christ stay in our hearts they will make our lives good, true, pure, holy, and loving.

JANUARY 18

These are the things which defile a man.—MATT. xv. 20.

IT is right to have clean hands, but it is more important to have a clean heart. Some people are most punctilious about minute ceremonies, while they pay small heed to the moralities of their lives. It is the inner life that makes character. A bad heart defiles everything; it is a nest of unholy things.

A lady took a dead child's photograph and touched it with her brush until the little one seemed to live in the picture. But in a day or two the face was covered with blotches. There was something on the paper on which the picture had been taken which worked up through the colors and spoiled it. So in many a life there are bad qualities which work up through all outside manners and refinements, and spoil the beauty.

The Syrophenician woman knew she was in the presence of One who could heal her child, and she simply would not go away till she got her plea; her importunity prevailed upon Him. We give up too easily when the answer is slow in coming.

When Jesus heard of it, He departed thence by ship into a desert place apart.—MATT. xiv. 13.

JESUS loved the Baptist, and was grieved when He died. He sought to get into a quiet place where He might receive God's comfort. Another reason for His going away was that His disciples might get rest. This shows the thoughtfulness of Jesus for His friends. He knows now when we are tired, when our work is too hard for us, or our hours are too long.

When Jesus reached the secluded place He found throngs waiting. Yet He was not impatient with them. He gave up His own rest and set to work at once to relieve their distresses and supply their wants.

The measure of a man's usefulness is the number of people who need him. We say that Christ alone can meet people's needs and feed their hungers. But He would do it through us. The only hands He has for love's ministries are our hands. The only bread He has for human hunger is the bread that is in our baskets. "Give ye them to eat."

Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.—MATT. xiii. 46.

WE can well afford to give up all that we have to get Christ. If we receive the whole world in place of Him, the exchange would be at a fearful loss to us. The only way to get the pearl of great price is to part with the other pearls we have. We cannot keep these and get that. Christ is not to be bought for money, and yet we have to give all we have to get Him. The young ruler was told he must sell all he had and take Christ instead. He would not pay the price, and went away sorrowful.

Unbelief hinders even omnipotence. Jesus could not do many mighty works in Nazareth because of the unbelief of the people. His power ever waits on our faith. We do not know what blessings we keep from others by not believing. John the Baptist's death seemed untimely. But he did all that he was sent into the world to do. Each life has its own plan of God, something given it to do. When that is done it is time to die.

JANUARY 21

Behold, a sower went forth to sow.—MATT. xiii. 3.

WE are all both sowers and fields. Our words, our acts, our influences, as we touch other lives, become seeds. This is true not only of the good things that our lives scatter, but also of the evil. Then each life of ours is a little patch of ground on which other sowers are forever dropping seeds. Every person we talk with, every friendship we cherish, every book we read, sows seeds which will grow and help make the harvest of life for us. Christ is the great sower of good seed. He brings heavenly seeds to drop them on earthly soil.

We should not let ourselves be like the wayside, the beaten road. The good seed has no chance to grow on such soil. We should keep our hearts soft to take each holy impression. We must watch the soil in our patch of ground to keep out the thorns, for if the evil roots are left the good seed will have no chance to grow, and the bad will choke out the good. We should make our hearts deep soil in which the good seed will grow to ripeness.

When the Pharisees saw it, they said unto Him.—MATT. xii. 2.

SOME people are always watching others, to find fault with them. They seem to think that their business is to keep other people right, and so they forget to look after the wrong things in themselves. We should never forget that our first duty is to do right ourselves. We shall not have to answer for anybody else, but for ourselves we surely shall.

The Sabbath is given to be a blessing to us, not a burden. God does not want us to go hungry on His day. He desires mercy, not sacrifice. The Jews thought Jesus broke the Sabbath in healing the man with the withered hand. But Jesus told them that it was right to heal on the sacred day. It is right for physicians to continue on their rounds of mercy on the Sabbath, and for nurses to stay at their posts with their patients. We need not be afraid to entrust our lives to Christ, even if they are bruised and almost destroyed. No gentle, kindly surgeon ever had such skill in dealing with hurt lives, and He will restore us to beauty.

Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see.—MATT. xi. 4.

EVEN the best men may sometimes doubt. John the Baptist, in his dungeon, began to wonder whether after all Jesus was the Messiah. The right thing to do with our doubts is to take them to Jesus. That is what John did. Christ is very patient with our weakness, and makes plain to us the things that perplex us.

The best evidences of Christ's divinity and Messiahship are the things that Christianity does in the world. Jesus proved to John that He was the Messiah by doing works of kindness to the poor and the troubled.

The fruits of Christianity are the wonderful works Christianity has done in the world—the saving of souls and the blessings that it leaves everywhere. It is a serious responsibility to have the gospel of Christ preached to us. If we accept the message, it brings great good to us. But if we reject it, it would have been better if we had never heard it at all. Christ invites all weary and overburdened ones to come to Him, and promises to give them rest.

It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master.—MATT. x. 25.

JESUS does not promise His disciples an easy time. He endured suffering, and we cannot expect better treatment than our Master had. We may be sure always of divine protection.

The strange word about the numbering of the hairs of our head means that the smallest things in our lives are included in God's providence.

One of the greatest of Christ's words is that about confessing Him. He wants all His friends to let everybody know that they belong to Him and are on His side. This means more than joining the Church, or getting up in a Christian Endeavor meeting and saying, "I love Christ." We are to confess Him at our business, in society, among the worst people. The promise Jesus gave was that if we own Him in this world He will own us in the other world. It will be a great thing to have Christ own us on the Judgment Day. But we must own Him now, whatever the world says, whatever it may cost, if we would have Him confess us before His Father.

JANUARY 25

These twelve Jesus sent forth.—MATT. x. 5.

JESUS took twelve men and prepared them so that they could take up His work when He went away and carry it on. He wants all His followers to be apostles. They must be disciples first, learners, and then apostles. We are not ready to go out for Christ till He gives us authority over evil and power to do good. Some one gives this rule for life: "Make yourself good, and make other people happy." Some people try first to make others good, but we should begin with ourselves.

The apostles were to be the helpers of others in every way they could be. They were to heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. Jesus gave them power to do all these things. He gives us power to do whatever He wants us to do. Jesus sent His disciples out amid dangers. We need never fear to go where Christ sends us. Sometimes the only way to save our life is to lose it.

"*'Tis man's perdition to be safe,*
When for the truth he ought to die."

Come and lay Thy hand upon her, and she shall live.—MATT. ix. 18.

THERE is nothing that Jesus cannot do. This ruler had not the slightest doubt that the Master could heal his dying child. We may have just as strong faith in Christ when any of ours are sick. If our friend dies, we know that that was the way of God's love for him. He could have spared his life if that had been best.

Much of Christ's work of love was wayside ministry. He was hastening with the ruler to heal his dying child when the woman touched His garment's hem.

Good people are always giving out help in even unconscious ways. As they go about performing their common tasks, those who come near them receive help from merely touching the hem of their garments. Even Christ's power to heal and help waits on faith. The blind men cried, "Have mercy on us," but before He opened their eyes Jesus asked them, "Believe ye that I am able to do this?" If they had said "No," they would not have been cured. Many prayers of ours fail because we do not believe.

If thou wilt, Thou canst.—MATT. viii. 2.

WE get from Christ according to our faith. The leper said, "If Thou wilt, Thou canst." That was royal believing, and at once Jesus said, "I will." There was a splendid faith also in the centurion. He showed humility in not thinking himself worthy to have Jesus come under his roof, and faith in saying that a mere word of the Master's would be enough. The visit of Jesus to Peter's house was interesting. There was a woman sick there. Jesus touched her hand and the fever left her.

There are other fevers besides those we ask physicians to treat—fevers of discontent, of anxiety, of fretfulness, of sorrow. If only we would have the touch of Christ on our head it would cool our fever and quiet our hearts. On the boat we see the peace of Jesus in His sleeping in the storm. Then we see His power in His quieting of the winds and waves. We may trust Him in earth's wildest tempest. No harm can come to us on any sea if He is with us in the boat.

JANUARY 28

Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.—MATT. xxiv. 42.

THERE is only one thing that we are absolutely sure of in the future—Christ's coming. We do not know when or how He will come. We only know that He will come.

"*The Master will knock at my door some night,*
And there, in the silence hushed and dim,
Will wait for my coming with lamp alight,
To open immediately to Him.

. . . . . .

"*If this is the only thing foretold*
Of all my future life, then I pray
That quietly watchful I may hold
The key of a golden faith each day
Fast shut in my grasp, that, when I hear
His step, be it at dawn or at midnight dim,
Straightway may I arise without a fear,
And open immediately to Him."

Without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers.—Rom. i. 9.

WE do not pray enough for others. The tendency of closet or solitary prayer is that we pray only for ourselves. We need to guard against this. No selfishness is quite so unworthy as selfishness when we are at God's throne of grace. Especially should we pray for our friends. No matter how much we may do for them in practical ways, ministering to them, advancing their interests, speaking on their behalf, showing them kindnesses, if we do not pray for them we have failed in friendship's most important duty.

We need to give careful thought also to the matter of our prayers for our friends—the things we ask for them. If they are sick, we ask that they may recover, perhaps not thinking to ask also that blessing may come to them in and through their sickness. Our prayers for those we love should always include the things that are indeed the best—God's best: that God's will may be done in them, that they may grow in grace and have the image of Christ imprinted on their lives.

JANUARY 30

Ye know not what ye ask.—MATT. xx. 22.

EVERY true mother wishes noble things for her children. Not always, however, do even mothers seek the really best things for their children.

The mother of James and John seems to have had only an earthly dream for her sons, although it was the honor of being in Christ's kingdom she craved for them. Christian mothers should think of the things of divine love and grace for their children.

Christ takes our mistaken prayers and answers them in a far better way than we dreamed of when we made them. He gave the brothers high places, though they were not such high places as they had in mind. We ask Him to bless us, and He does bless us, but sometimes through the loss of the very things which we thought He would give us. The two disciples did not shrink from the Master's cup and baptism, though they did not know that day that what they were asking they could not accept. They knew later, and did not then fail their Master.

Love worketh no ill to his neighbor.—Rom. xiii. 10.

WE help or hurt others, according as we stand or falter in life's trials. We do not know what of strength it may mean to other souls for us to be faithful any little hour. We do not know what eyes are upon us in the life of the common days, with eager desire to learn if indeed there be grace in Christ to help one to be true. Our victory means for others a belief in Christ's power to help, and our failure would mean the weakening of faith and hope in them. We never know what interests of others may depend on our being faithful and firm any hour.

"*Oh, if our brother's blood cry out to us,*
How shall we meet Thee, who hast loved us all—
Thee whom we never loved, not loving him?
The unloving cannot chant with seraphim,
Bear harp of gold or palm victorious,
Or face the Vision Beatifical."

Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.—ROM. v. 1.

PEACE with God is the beginning of all Christian peace. Mount Etna casts a shadow every morning over all the fair and beautiful island of Sicily. The people, as they go on with their work or their pleasure, do not allow themselves to think of the shadow or to speak of it. It seems ominous of doom as it moves silently over their gardens and homes. The shadow reminds them that within the terrible mountain slumber the fires which any hour may pour ruin over every lovely scene. It is a more ominous shadow than that of Etna which lies over this world—the curse of sin.

No one can be at peace until he is reconciled to God. But when we believe on Jesus Christ we are safe from condemnation, and have peace with God. Then all good things follow. We are God's friends and He is our Friend. We are at home now with Him. His power is our refuge, a shelter for our feebleness amid all life's perils.

As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you. —Isa. lxvi. 13.

EVERY one knows how a mother comforts her child. It is not so much by words as by love's tenderness. In great sorrow we do not care to hear arguments and reasons—not even verses of Scripture; we want simply to rest in silence on the bosom of love. Jesus put God's comfort among the Beatitudes: "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." There must be something very precious, very rich in comfort, that makes it worth while even to have sorrow to get it.

Some of us think we are comforting people when we sit down beside them in their trouble and sympathize with them, as we call it, going down into the depths with them, but doing nothing to lift them up. To comfort is to strengthen. We comfort others truly when we make them stronger to endure, when we enable them to pass through their sorrows victoriously. That is the way Christ comforts. He sympathizes with them, but it is that He may make them strong to endure.

The word of the Lord came, . . . Go and tell my servant David, Thus saith the Lord, Shalt thou build Me an house?—2 SAM. vii. 4, 5.

THE Lord did not reprove David for his desire to build Him a temple. Elsewhere God said to him, "Thou didst well that it was in thine heart." If we are desirous of doing for God some service which it is not His will we should do, He is pleased with our wish to serve Him, though He declines the proffer.

Another suggestion here is that every one has his own particular part to do in the Lord's work. David was not to build the temple—that was Solomon's mission—but he had other things to do which were equally important. Part of David's mission was to be the hymn-writer for the ancient Church. Who thinks it would have been a grander thing for David to build a temple of stone and gold and cedar? That gorgeous house —where is it now? But David's psalms are living yet and are sung everywhere. To every man his work. And we please God best when we accept, and do well and cheerfully, that which is given to us to do.

FEBRUARY 4

They told David, saying, That the men of Jabesh-gilead were they that buried Saul.—2 SAM. ii. 4.

THIS word about the men of Jabesh-gilead calls up a tender little episode amid the cruelties of ancient war. When the Philistines found the bodies of Saul and his sons on the battlefield, they carried them away and hung them on the walls of the town of Beth-shan, exposing them to public gaze. Jabesh-gilead was a town which Saul had once helped when it was in trouble. The people remembered this old-time kindness, and now, when the bodies of the king and his sons were exposed in such an inhuman way, they rescued them from dishonor.

We should never forget a favor done by another to us, and if we have an opportunity we should be careful to return kindness for kindness. It is a good thing for us to keep our heart warm in the midst of all this world's coldness and hardness. This we can do by cherishing always gentle feelings and by doing at every opportunity deeds of kindness.

FEBRUARY 5

And David perceived that the Lord had established him king . . . for His people Israel's sake.—2 SAM. v. 12.

ALL good gifts come to us from God. Does the wind waft our bark forward? God sent the wind. Do friends help us to get onward and upward? God gave us the friends. Are there favorable circumstances in our lives and happy outcomes from our ventures? God shaped the circumstances. Then whatever prosperity God gives us, He gives it that with it we may bless the world. The honor He puts upon us is not a bit of laurel for our own brow, but is bestowed for the sake of others. Wealth is given to be administered in such a way as to make it the largest possible blessing to others. Joys are bestowed that the world may get the brightness, the joy, and the inspiration.

"*God sent His singers upon earth,*
With songs of gladness and of mirth,
That they might touch the hearts of men,
And bring them back to heaven again."

FEBRUARY 6

Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but perceivest not the beam that is in thine own eye?—LUKE vi. 41.

AN old writer says, "Men are more apt to use spectacles to behold other men's faults, than looking-glasses to behold their own." A man can see a very small speck of dust in his neighbor's eye, while he is entirely unaware of the great spot in his own. We should imagine that a beam in a man's eye would so blind him that he could not see the mote in his brother's eye. As Jesus expresses it, however, the man with the beam is the very one who sees the mote and thinks himself competent to pull it out.

A vain man is the first to detect vanity in another. A bad-tempered person is most apt to be censorious toward another who displays irritability. Rude people are the first to be hurt by the rudeness in others. If we are quick to perceive faults in others, the probability is that we have far greater faults ourselves. This truth ought to make us exceedingly careful in our judgment and modest in our expression of censure.

FEBRUARY 7

My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord.—PROV. iii. 11.

IT is not possible that we should really enjoy being chastened. Indeed the Bible says, "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous." Not even the grace of God in our heart can take the sting out of chastening. We are not expected, then, to like it. But we are told not to despise it. That is, we are to accept it without murmuring, without complaining, and reverently, as God's messenger to us, bringing a blessing. It should help us to accept chastening to remember that it is our Father's chastening. He would not take pleasure in causing us pain, nor would He do it at all, were it not in some way for our good.

We should not despise any instruction our Father gives us, however costly and painful it may be. He lets us suffer because He loves us, and would make our lives beautiful and holy. We should be willing to endure any pain or trial in order to have the likeness of Christ fashioned in our life.

FEBRUARY 8

There met him two possessed with devils.—MATT. viii. 28.

IT looks as if Jesus crossed the sea just to heal these demoniacs. At least He returned as soon as He had done this one act of mercy. It is worth a great effort to show even one little kindness to a person in trouble. These demoniacs were a terror to the neighborhood. But Jesus left them sitting, clothed and in their right mind. He can take the most hopeless moral ruin and restore it to spiritual beauty.

The healing of the paralytic was wrought through vicarious faith. The man was carried to Jesus by his friends, and it was when He saw "their faith" that He gave the man a blessing. There is great power in intercessory prayer. Our deepest need is not the curing of bodily ills, but the forgiving of our sins. These men wanted their friend's palsy healed, but Jesus saw a trouble worse than that, and first forgave the man's sins. When we are sick it is not enough to ask that we be made well—we should ask first that our sins be forgiven.

FEBRUARY 9

I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.—HEB. xiii. 5.

THERE is a striking word in the book of Ecclesiasticus: "Look at the generations of old, and see: did ever any trust in the Lord, and was confounded? or did any abide in His fear, and was forsaken? or whom did He ever despise, that called upon Him?"

God has said He will never leave us nor forsake us. The word "never" is emphatic. It covers every possible condition and all circumstances. God will never, never forsake us. The closest human friendship is not absolutely sure; even a mother may forsake her child. But God's love never fails. Each believer in Christ is sure of a place all his own in the heart of the Redeemer.

"*Drooping, we journey on alone,*
We only mark the heavy stone:
We do not see the helping love
Which moves before us as we move,
Which chides our faithless, vain dismay,
And rolls for us the stone away."

Neither durst any man from that day forth ask Him any more questions.—MATT. xxii. 46.

THOSE who tried to entangle Christ by their questions and quibbles altogether failed. In modern days there are always those who are trying to throw doubt about Christ's teachings by pointing out contradictions and inconsistencies. But from all such criticisms the words of Christ come without discredit, shining in the clearness and brightness of truth.

A little poem tells the story of "the anvil of God's Word."

"*And so the Bible anvil of God's word,*
For ages sceptic blows have beat upon;
And though the noise of Paine Voltaire, was heard,
The anvil is unworn, the hammers gone.
Apprentice blows of ignorance, forsooth,
May awe with sound and blinding sparks death-whirled;
The Master holds and turns the iron, His truth,
And shapes it as He wills, to bless the world."

FEBRUARY 11

They twain shall be one flesh.—MATT. xix. 5.

ONE of the best ways we can bless the world is to make our own home sweet and happy. If we can restore one little spot of earth into Edenic happiness we have done something toward the regaining of the lost Paradise. It begins in marriage. For anything so sacred, the choice should be made deliberately and wisely. Loyalty in the marriage relation is an essential of home happiness. "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." This word of Christ is too easily and too often disregarded. It is not God's will that any who are joined in marriage should be separated. It is meant to be till death.

Jesus loved little children and the children loved Him. When the disciples, misunderstanding their Master, thought it was kindness to Him to keep the babies away, He rebuked them sharply. "Suffer the little children, and forbid them not, to come unto Me." Since children are so dear to Christ, the home where little children are is especially dear to Him.

O taste and see that the Lord is good.—PSALM XXXIV. 8.

WE can learn of God's goodness only by experience. When Nathanael doubted that any good thing could come out of Nazareth, Philip did not argue with him. He said quietly, "Come and see." Nathanael went with Philip, saw Jesus, heard His words, and was convinced.

Some people will not believe that God is good, that all the blessings Christians tell about are really to be found in Him. There is little use in reasoning with such people, trying to prove what we say. But if we can get them to try our God for themselves, they will soon learn that the half had not been told them. If we would find more and more of the good there is in Christ, we must learn by experience. It is good to take the words He has spoken and put them to the test. We shall find in every one a treasure of blessing. God is always bidding us to try Him by trusting and obeying Him. "Taste and see that the Lord is good."

I will bless the Lord at all times: His praise shall continually be in my mouth.—PSALM XXXIV. 1.

IT is not hard to bless the Lord at some times. There are days when all is bright. There is no sickness in our house. No recent sorrow has left our heart sad. It is easy then to bless the Lord. But there are other times when things are different. Business is not prosperous. Or, health is broken. We begin to say this verse, but we cannot get through it. "I will bless the Lord at——" We cannot bless the Lord for the broken health, for the empty chair. Yet there the words stand. We cannot make them read: "I will bless the Lord at some times: His praise shall be in my mouth on certain days—days when the sun shines." It is not our business to write Bible verses; it is our business rather to bring our lives up to the standard of the inspired words. So we must learn to say the verse just as it is written. We must learn to bless the Lord on the dark days as well as the bright days. We must learn to praise God in pain as well as in pleasure.

I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise.—ROM. i. 14.

IN one place St. Paul advises that we should owe no man anything. Here, however, he tells us that he is in debt to everybody. Is he consistent? He makes one exception in speaking of debt—we are to owe nothing but love. That is a debt we can never pay off. If we go to bed at night owing no man, we shall wake up in the morning to find ourselves in debt again to everybody. Love is the debt St. Paul said he owed to every one. We meet no one on the street, rich or poor, enemy or friend, to whom we are not in debt. We must be sure also to pay him what we owe him, and not pass by on the other side. Remember the story of the wounded man on the Jericho road. During the time he lay there, three men came by. Each one of them owed him a debt, but two of them did not pay it. Then came one who paid his debt, stopping and ministering to his wounded neighbor. We should recognize our debt to every one and pay it.

His disciples came, and took up the body, and buried it, and went and told Jesus.—MATT. xiv. 12.

WHEN one dies in our home, and our hearts are breaking, we should go and tell Jesus. It will do us good to tell Him. We may not care to tell our trouble to any human friend. Some sorrows are too sacred to be unveiled to any eyes. But we need never shrink from telling Jesus. He can understand our grief, for He knows all human pain, not alone as God, but as man, for He experienced all sorrow. He will treat our sorrow, too, with most delicate gentleness. The very words spoken in love to comfort us fall ofttimes with rude impact upon our bruised heart and give fresh pain. The gentlest touch of a human hand hurts where it is meant to help. But the voice of Jesus is so gentle that its tones fall like soothing music on the quivering heart, and the hand of Jesus is so skilful that its touch gives healing. We need never fear to tell Jesus of our sorrow: He is the truest Comforter and the wisest Healer of hurt hearts.

Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous.—PSALM xxxii. 11.

JOY is a Christian duty. God wants all His children to be happy. Do they never have any troubles? Yes, many. Still God wants us to rejoice. We must notice, however, what kind of joy it is which we are so earnestly urged to have. It is not the world's joy—"Be glad in the Lord." Those whose gladness depends only on earthly things have no assurance of its lasting long, for all earthly things are transitory. When it is the love of Christ that gives us gladness, our joy is sure beyond failure, for He loveth us to the end. To be glad in the Lord is to do day by day our simple duty, leaving to Him all the care, all providing, all protecting, never allowing a shadow of anxiety to cross our mind.

"*And should the twilight darken into night,*
And sorrow grow to anguish, be thou strong;
Thou art in God, and nothing can go wrong
Which a fresh life-pulse cannot set aright."

In Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night.—1 KINGS iii. 5.

SOLOMON was beginning his reign. God came to him in a dream. The question the Lord asked Solomon is one He asks every young person. Some one says, "If God gave me my choice out of all the things that people desire, I would make a wise choice too." God does give to you the same privileges, your choice of all good things. Does not Christ say, "Ask, and ye shall receive"?

The days are like messengers from God, and we do not know what they carry and offer to us. We take a few simple things and let the divine messenger pass on. "But why must I make a choice?" some one asks. "God is wiser than I am. He knows what is the best thing in all the world for me. Why does He not Himself choose for me, giving me that which is best? Why must I in my ignorance and inexperience choose for myself?" One of the strange things about our life is that we must make our own choice. Even God cannot choose for the feeblest of His children.

If the Syrians be too strong for me, then thou shalt help me: but if the children of Ammon be too strong for thee, then I will come and help thee.—2 SAM. x. 11.

HERE we get a good lesson on the duty of helping each other. If one army saw that the battle was too much for their brethren in another division, they were to hasten to their help. The duty is the same always. If I am strong and you are struggling in weakness, I must hasten to your help. Loving our neighbor as ourself means helping him when he is in trouble. There is a Christian communism which uses its abundance of whatever kind to supply the lack in others.

"If I should see
A brother languishing in sore distress,
And I should turn and leave him comfortless,
When I might be
A messenger of hope and happiness—
How could I ask to have what I denied,
In my own hour of bitterness supplied?"

The king said, Is there not yet any of the house of Saul, that I may shew the kindness of God unto him?—2 SAM. IX. 3.

REMEMBERING kindness is a mark of a noble mind. True friendship never forgets. Yet it looks as if David had forgotten his friend for a good while. It was fifteen years after Jonathan died when David looked up this son of Saul. Meanwhile the lame boy had been getting along as best he could, over at Lodebar. A good many more of us show the same tardiness in doing the kindnesses we owe to others. We delay until our return has lost half its meaning. Indeed some of us never get the return made at all. We wait till the friend is dead, and then we send flowers for his coffin.

Is there one to whom you are indebted, waiting now, somewhere, in the shadow, for you to come to show him the kindness of God? Is there a child of some one dead who befriended you at a time when kindness meant much to you, now needing a friend? Should you not repay to the living the debt you owe to the dead?

David prepared abundantly before his death.—1 CHRON. xxii. 5.

WE all build on foundations laid by others. It is the part of some to plan and prepare, while others carry out the plans. The temple was born in David's heart; it was one of his thoughts. Then he made costly preparations for it. Solomon had little to do but to build the house; the materials were ready to his hand.

We are apt to undervalue preparatory work. It is like the foundation of a building; it is buried away, and no one sees it or admires it. Yet there can be no house for men to praise, unless there is first a foundation, strong and secure. Without David's part, it is not likely that there would have been a temple.

The same thing goes on continually. One sows, another reaps. One plans, another executes. I know a teacher who says her mission is to bring scholars in the rough into a Sunday school, and, when she has tamed them, to pass them over to another teacher and to go out and look for more.

If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.—MATT. xvi. 24.

NOT only was the way of suffering the divinely appointed way for Jesus Himself, but it is the way also in which His followers must walk. He walked among the thorns and through the dark valleys, because along these ways lay His path to glory. We cannot do Christ's will and refuse to walk in the hard paths in which He walked. We must deny ourselves, if we would be Christ's disciples. Self-denial means the dethroning of self and the seating of Christ upon the heart's throne. When we deny ourselves we do not go our own way, we accept Christ and follow Him.

Taking up the cross is also important in discipleship. The cross stands for anything that is a hard or painful duty. There is no merit in carrying a cross merely for the sake of the cross; it must be taken up because it comes in the way of obedience. There is no merit in making crosses for ourselves; the only cross that brings blessing is that we find in following Christ.

Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.—MATT. xvi. 16.

UNDER the power of the Holy Spirit Peter had a glimpse of Jesus in His glorious beauty. He saw Him as the Messiah who had been promised so long. At last the Promised One had come, and now Peter saw and believed in Him as the Christ. Not only so, but he saw Him, too, as divine—the Son of the living God.

This confession shows us what we ought to think about Christ. He is the Messiah, God's Anointed One. He became man, thus coming down close to us.

Then He is the Son of God, divine; possessing all power, infinite in His love and grace, able to do for us all that we need, and to lift us up to eternal life and glory. So we have here a most comprehensive creed.

If our belief is like Peter's, and if Christ is all to us in our life that we make Him in our creed, we are resting on the rock. But we must make sure that we have Christ in our life as well as in our creed.

Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites.—MATT. xxiii. 14.

USUALLY we see the gentle phases of Christ's character and teaching. He is compassionate toward suffering and sorrow. He is so gentle that He will not break a bruised reed nor quench a dimly burning wick. But here we see Him in a severe and stern aspect. He speaks to the Pharisees in scathing denunciation. They taught the truths of God, but did not live them. They made great display of devoutness, but it was only that men might think them religious.

The Master's arraignment of the Pharisees was terribly severe. But the same lips uttered these woes that uttered the Beatitudes and the gracious invitations to the weary and the heavy laden. Christ is holy as well as loving. Penitence is welcomed to His feet, but hypocrisy is denounced. In the last verses of this chapter we see both aspects. He arraigns Jerusalem for the murder of the prophets and the rejection of heaven's messengers, and then tells how He would have gathered the people in love, but they would not.

FEBRUARY 24

He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.
—MATT. xxiv. 13.

THIS is a world of peril and danger. The day which opens with calmness and beauty may end in disaster and trial. The words of the Master here tell of great calamities—wars and rumors of wars, the clashing of nations, famines, earthquakes, and these, He says, would be but the beginning of troubles. There would be persecution for His friends, which would try their loyalty, and in the testings many would fail.

But in all these dark days one clear light would shine. Those who would endure to the end should be saved. We have this comfort in all life's trials. We cannot avoid suffering. We must meet temptation, but we know that if only we continue faithful, resisting even unto blood, no temptation can harm us. If we endure to the end we shall be saved. Nothing can wrest us out of Christ's hands, nothing but unfaithfulness. If we endure, we shall come out victors over every enemy and every danger, through Him who loves us.

Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing.—MATT. xxiv. 46.

IN the great events which shall mark the end, not one of Christ's own shall be lost. While the sun shall be darkened, and the stars fall, and the heavens be shaken, the angels shall be gathering out God's chosen ones from all quarters. As a ground of confidence for those who have committed themselves to Christ, we have the assurance that no word He ever spoke shall fail of accomplishment.

The time of Christ's coming again is among the secret things which belong to God. We are not to trouble ourselves to try to know when it will be. There will be no time to prepare when the event occurs, for it will be sudden and unexpected; hence we must be always ready. Our Lord when He comes would find all His friends quietly and methodically doing their work. This is the only true preparation, and the only way to live so as to be always ready for Christ's coming, whether He come to us in what we call death, or in His own glorious appearing.

FEBRUARY 26

They that were ready went in.—MATT. XXV. 10.

RUSKIN'S motto was "To-day." It was graven on a piece of chalcedony which lay always before him on his desk. No duty must ever be postponed. The difference in the virgins in our Lord's parable was that the wise did every duty at the right time, while the foolish deferred things. The wise were not taken by surprise. They had no need to stay awake; they were ready for their Lord, however suddenly He might come. The others slept without preparation, and the bridegroom's coming smote dismay to their hearts.

We cannot prepare for life's great emergencies at the moment when they arise, but faithfulness to duties as they come fits us for any emergency, however suddenly we may have to face it.

There is a difference in the gifts and opportunities of men, but all may win reward by faithfully using what they have. We should not forget that condemnation of one man comes here, not for crimes, but for not making use of what had been entrusted to him.

FEBRUARY 27

He shall separate them one from another.—MATT. xxv. 32.

OUR Lord's parable of the Judgment is wonderfully suggestive. There will be a great separation on that day of days. Men's relation to Christ will determine their destiny. Great crimes are not charged against those who are assigned to the King's left hand—the charge is that they have failed to be kind to those who needed kindness. They are condemned for not doing. This is a startling truth. We sin against Christ when we pass by those who are suffering or are in need of help.

Another wonderful revelation here is that Christ puts Himself in the place of His friends in this world, so that what we do to them we do to Him, and when we neglect one of His, even the lowliest, we neglect Him. "I was hungry, and ye gave Me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me no drink." This should make us kind to every needy or suffering one who comes before us. It may be Christ. It will be very sad if we turn Him hungry from our doors.

FEBRUARY 28

Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven?—Acts i. 11.

THE last glimpse this earth had of Jesus before He went away was as His hands were stretched out over His friends in the act of blessing them. That is always His attitude toward the world.

Jesus ever lives before God as our Intercessor. As such He has all our interests in His hands. He is also with us always, though we see Him not. Christ's going away into heaven was not a loss to earth. His disciples stood gazing up after Him when He had been received up, but they were called away from this gazing. "Why stand ye gazing up into heaven?" Duty was waiting for them on the earth. They were summoned to prayer, and then presently, in answer to prayer, the Holy Spirit was given and the disciples went forth to their work.

We need to be diligent in duty, not wasting a moment in idle gazing. We do not have to climb to the stars to find Christ. He is ever near us, closer than our nearest friend.

It came to pass after this, that David inquired of the Lord. —2 Sam. ii. 1.

FOR many years David had been waiting to become king. He knew God's plan—that he should be Saul's successor. Now Saul was dead, and David knew that the kingdom was his. Still he shows the most patient spirit, not taking a step until he has asked God what he should do.

We should always wait for God, never hurrying His providences. We should not enter upon any course until we have sought His direction. The Bible exhorts us to acknowledge the Lord in all our ways, promising that then He will direct our paths. We should move reverently through this world, ever praying, "Show me Thy way." Even in the most common matters we should seek to know God's will. A beautiful prayer in one of the psalms is, "Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk."

"*Let every day*
Be modelled still
By Thine own hand; my will
Be only Thine, however deep
I have to bend, Thy hand to keep."

Jonathan hath yet a son, which is lame on his feet.—2 SAM. ix. 3.

IT seems to have been the nurse's fault. She ran with the baby and stumbled, and he was crippled for life.

There are a great many men and women lamed for life by somebody's stumbling. They may not limp necessarily: the lameness may be in their souls, but that is worse than physical laming. One may be lame in one's feet and yet be beautiful in character.

But the laming of a soul leaves a moral blemish which may be carried into eternity. It is a terrible thing for any one by a moment's carelessness or by a misstep to send a man lame and helpless through life; it is worse still to cripple a life, a character, for the eternal years. We cannot be too careful how we live.

Jesus spoke no more solemn words than what He said about the person who causes a little one to stumble. If we live heedlessly we may do this. Let us live ever in the light of Christ.

MARCH 2

Blessed be ye of the Lord, that ye have shewed this kindness unto your lord, even unto Saul.—2 SAM. ii. 5.

WE must remember how Saul had treated David, hunting him among the hills as if he had been a wild beast. Yet David never showed any resentment. Twice, at least, he had spared Saul's life, when the king was in his power. Through all those days of bitter experience, David's heart remained loving, free from resentment and bitterness.

When Saul died, David's grief expressed itself in an elegy full of tender feeling. Now, when he learned of the honor shown by the people of Jabesh-gilead to Saul's body, his heart was gladdened, and he was deeply grateful. All this is evidence of a magnanimous spirit. It is the very spirit which Jesus commended, a thousand years later, as that which belongs to the kingdom of heaven. The problem of true living is to keep the heart always sweet, and always to have warmth within, whatever the weather without. "Always keep sweet and go on shining," is a good motto.

MARCH 3

The book of the generation of Jesus Christ.—MATT. i. 1.

THERE would not seem to be much interest in a chapter of names. We would not suppose that there is any devotional value in such a list as we have in this chapter. Yet we find much here that is spiritually helpful. For one thing, there is no missing link in this genealogy.

Another interesting fact is that, while the line ran through the chosen family from beginning to end, it received Gentile blood at least in the cases of Rachab and Ruth. Thus the Gentiles also had a share in the Messiah.

The name by which the Messiah was to be called tells us of the purpose of His coming. "Thou shalt call His name JESUS; for it is He that shall save His people from their sins."

The other name of the Messiah given here is Immanuel—God with us. The Incarnation meant God coming down to be with us. Those who saw Him saw the Father. Let us not forget that even chapters of names may enshrine great truths, holy facts, of vital worth.

MARCH 4

Behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem.—MATT. ii. 1.

IT is not always those nearest to Christ who first see His glory. He was born among the Jews, but the first homage paid to Him, excepting by the shepherds, was by wise men from far away. We have Christ in our very midst: do we see Him? do we honor Him? We do not understand about the star that guided the wise men. But, whatever it was, it led them to the King they sought. If only we follow the light we have, we shall not fail to reach the blessing we need.

The wise men of Jerusalem could easily tell where the Christ was to be born. Yet not one of them went to Bethlehem to worship the Messiah. It is not enough for us to be able to tell others where to find Christ; we should seek to find Him for ourselves. No power can snatch out of God's hands the feeblest life He is watching over. Herod felt sure of destroying the new-born King, but, before the blow fell, the Holy Child was on His way to Egypt.

MARCH 5

The voice of one crying in the wilderness.—MATT. iii. 3.

IT is a good thing to be a voice if it is a voice given to God. John was a voice telling the people that Jesus was coming.

It is well to have a good family line, but we are not saved by genealogy. It was not enough to be of the family of Abraham, although that was splendid stock. It is not enough now to have had a godly grandfather, although it is a great thing to come of a fine ancestry. We can be saved only by being ourselves in right relation with God.

The baptism of Jesus was His consecration to His Messiahship. He knew, too, what it meant. The shadow of the cross fell upon Him as He stood there by the Jordan. Yet He faltered not, but quietly accepted His anointing and went on His way. So when we give ourselves to God, for whatever service He may allot to us, the heavens again open and we receive the Spirit and hear the Father's witness.

MARCH 6

Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted.—MATT. iv. 1.

JESUS must be tried and proved before He set out on His work of saving the world. If He could not overcome the Adversary for Himself, He need not offer to be the deliverer of others. He was victorious, and now He can help us in our temptations. If Jesus had made stones into bread for His hunger, He would have been distrusting His Father's care. If He had cast Himself down from the pinnacle, He would have been claiming God's protection without doing God's bidding. If He had accepted the tempter's offer of the world, He would have been taking Satan's way to power instead of God's. When Jesus had won His victory, angels were sent to minister to Him. So always does God bless those who have endured faithfully.

Jesus saved the world by gathering men to Himself. His call was, "Come unto Me." That is where Christian life must always begin. We must become Christ's followers before we can do any work for Him.

MARCH 7

He opened His mouth, and taught them.—MATT. v. 2.

THE first word of Christ's first sermon was "Blessed." The last glimpse the world had of Him, as He was ascending, He was blessing His friends. He came to bless the world, not to blight it; to comfort sorrow, not to make sorrow.

The Beatitudes are transcripts of the things of heaven. It is well for us to study these "Blesseds," for they show the qualities in life which please God and make true happiness. The world would not say "Happy are they that mourn," "Happy are the meek." Christ's Beatitudes describe those who are in the heavenly kingdom, and that is where every Christian belongs.

Salt preserves from corruption. Christians are to save the world from moral decay, and to give to all life a seasoning which will make it sweeter, more wholesome.

When Jesus said, "Ye are the light of the world," He meant that we are to be like lamps shining in the darkness. We are to live sweetly, patiently, kindly, helpfully.

MARCH 8

Ye have heard. . . . But I say unto you.—MATT. v. 21, 22.

CHRIST read new meanings into the commandments. Anybody would say it is wrong to murder another. If that is all the commandment forbids, not many people break it. But it is a great deal harder to keep, as Jesus explained it. He said that if we are angry with another, or if we speak with contempt of another, we have broken the commandment. If, when we are praying, we remember that we have injured another, we should go away at once and set things right, before we go on with our prayer. All contentions are bad, and if we are in the wrong we can only be worsted by keeping up the strife. Bad thoughts are sins, as well as bad acts. We need to keep a watch upon our hearts, where desires and feelings are born. A good many people think they have a right to pay back the injuries they receive. But that is not Christ's way. His law of love bids us return good for evil. The way we are to treat enemies is to love and pray for them.

MARCH 9

Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth.—MATT. vi. 3.

THE Master said His disciples ought not to wish to be seen of men when they do good things. They are to think only of pleasing the Father. If they seek human notice and praise, they will receive no other reward. But if they work only for the eye of God, they will have a heavenly reward.

Prayer is to be for God's ear, not men's. This does not mean that we are never to pray in public nor confess Christ in public. The meaning is that we are to live all our life for the eye of God, that we are never to perform religious acts to make an impression on others. In praying we are to seek first God's honor before we think of our own needs. Our prayers must be unselfish—asking for others as well as for ourselves. We must forgive those who have wronged us when we ask God to forgive us. God does not care for appearances; He looks into our hearts and counts only what He sees there.

MARCH 10

Ask, and it shall be given you.—MATT. vii. 7.

JESUS was never troubled with the question, "How can God answer prayer?" He lived with God all the days and talked with Him as freely as a child ever talked with its parents. He assures us that God is willing to give us whatever we need. We have only to ask for it. Of course our asking must be sincere and must be earnest. If the thing we ask for does not come, we are to seek for it. If we cannot find it, we are to knock. We need never be afraid that God will mock us by giving us something else in place of what we ask. If we need bread, He will not give us a stone instead. That is the way this world answers many of our desires. Earthly fathers are kind to their children; will God be less kind?

Our lives must be judged by their fruits, by the way we live, by our character and disposition. Christ does not care for our words of praise if we are not proving our love for Him by doing His will.

Let your hands be strengthened, and be ye valiant.—2 SAM. ii. 7.

COURAGE is one of the finest qualities in manhood. In the world the quality is rated so high that its absence makes a man an object of contempt. No insult stings one more deeply than to be called a coward. Courage is ofttimes associated with war. But we do not need to wait for war to give us a chance to be courageous. There is a higher courage than that which shows itself in brave deeds on a battlefield. It takes courage to be true amid all the world's temptations to be false. It requires courage to do what is right, when the multitude about us is doing things that are wrong. It takes courage to confess Christ before the world.

We all need to have our hands strengthened—only God can make us strong for the service to which He calls us. We are set to fight the battles of the Lord. We have victories to win against evil, against wrong. Without a brave heart and a strong hand we shall not be able to stand for God and for truth in this world.

Command thou that they hew me cedar trees out of Lebanon.—1 KINGS v. 6.

SOLOMON was determined to put into the Temple nothing but the best. Nothing imperfect, nothing unworthy, must go into that building for God. In the building of our character nothing that is not beautiful should be used. We should read the best books, so as to build into our life-temple only the whitest thoughts of the world.

Our friendships have much to do with the making of our character, and therefore we should have only good and true friends. Above all, we should read the Bible, for it contains God's words and thoughts. They are all whitest, purest marble, and there is no blemish or flaw anywhere in them. Then we should have the companionship of Christ, for He is the truest, the most inspiring Friend any one can have. We should put also into God's work that we do in other lives only the best. We should never give a touch to any character, through word, disposition, act, or influence of ours, which is not clean enough to appear before Christ's holy eyes.

MARCH 13

Let these my words, wherewith I have made supplication, . . . be nigh unto the Lord our God day and night.—1 KINGS viii. 59.

SOLOMON asked that God might not forget his prayers. The intercessions of Jesus for His people are being answered in every new blessing that comes to us. When a mother pleads for her child she would have her petition kept nigh to God day and night. She would have God keep His eye ever on her boy, wherever he may be, and in whatever danger.

It is a precious thought, too, that we do not need to be always reminding God of our desires for our friends, but that our prayers stay before Him, are not filed away and forgotten, as are many requests we make in places of power, but are always remembered. Even if sometimes we forget to pray, God does not forget, for He knows our heart's wishes, and will do more for us than we ask or think. We are told that God keeps our tears in His bottle—that is, He remembers our sorrows, and they are sacred to Him. Our prayers, too, we are assured, are laid up —"vials full of odors, which are the prayers of saints."

The Lord said unto him, I have heard thy prayer . . . : I have hallowed this house, which thou hast built.—1 KINGS ix. 3.

NO privilege that could be granted to any one in this world is so great as that of having God accept and use something of ours. One writes a hymn, like the twenty-third psalm, or "Rock of Ages, cleft for me," and God accepts it. Thousands sing it, and are lifted by it nearer to God. Or one writes a book, and Christ accepts it and allows it to carry blessing to many people, giving comfort in sorrow, strength in weakness, light in darkness, guidance in perplexity. Instead of making one proud to be thus used, it should make one more humble. Especially should he walk softly and carefully now, since God is using him; for God's seal is on him. That is what God meant when He said to Solomon that He had heard his prayer and had accepted the Temple which he had built, putting His name there. He meant that the acceptance of this work placed the king under new obligations to be faithful, made his life sacred thenceforward forever.

But if ye shall at all turn from following Me, . . . then will I cut off Israel out of the land which I have given them.—1 KINGS ix. 6, 7.

LIFE is a more perilous ocean than the Atlantic. People talk about the terrors of death, but living has greater terrors than dying. In Miss Procter's poem a child asks, "What is life, father?" and gets the answer that life is a battle, where many fail and yield. Then the child asks, "What is death, father?" We are not surprised that when she learns that death is the rest which comes at the end of the strife, she says, "Let me die, father; I fear to live." But the wise answer is, "You must live first, and win your crown on the battlefields of life." Life is full of perils, but there is One who can guard us from stumbling and present us faultless before the presence of God at last. We need only to have Christ for our Friend, and He will bring us safely through all peril. But without Christ we never can get home. A tourist in the Alps said he needed no guide, and he set out one morning alone. But he never returned.

MARCH 16

But whom say ye that I am?—MATT. xvi. 15.

IT really does matter what one thinks about Christ. For example, if we consider Him as only a man, we may admire His personal character and His teachings, but we cannot trust Him as our Saviour. A mere man could not by His death make atonement for our sins. A man could not deliver us in temptation, nor help us in weakness, nor guide us in the tangled paths of life. But if we believe in Christ as a divine being, all this is changed. His death was of sufficient value to atone for all sin. He is able to defend, deliver, and save His people.

An important question is what is Christ to us personally? Is He only in our creed, or is He our personal Saviour, our Friend, our Lord? It is this form of the question that most concerns us. There is only one person for whose opinions and beliefs we are individually responsible, and that is—ourself. Then mere opinions are not enough; we must have a personal, living faith in Christ if we would be saved.

From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto His disciples, how that He must . . . suffer . . . and be killed.—MATT. xvi. 21.

IT is always painful to speak to one's friends of one's coming sufferings or death. It must have been hard for Jesus to break to His disciples, in their enthusiasm and hope, the fact of which He now speaks to them. He knew how it would disappoint and grieve them. But it was time they should learn the true nature of His Messiahship. All their Messianic expectations were of one who should be a great King, establishing a universal empire. The word "must" in our Lord's announcement is important—He must suffer. This was the way marked out for the Messiah in Old-Testament prophecies. He was not to be invested with mere human glory and to follow out men's ideas of greatness. He should bless the world by giving Himself for it. There could be no redemption for men but by the atonement, and the Son of God was the only one who could make this atonement. We must never forget that the cross was an essential element in Christ's work as Saviour.

MARCH 18

Of making many books there is no end.—Eccles. xii. 12.

ONE who can write what people will read has a wide opportunity of doing good. There is need for consecrated pens. One can write helpfully only after living victoriously. We are apt not to realize the cost at which we receive the good we get from helpful books. We read the smooth, graceful sentences with delight. They impart to us instruction, inspiration, comfort, and courage. We give little thought to the writer, or we think of him as one who wields a facile pen. It rarely occurs to us to think of him as one who has endured pain or suffered loss, or passed through sorrow, in order that he might give to us the words in which we find so much help. But the truth is that no strengthening thought comes to us from another without cost to the other, some time, some way. Men and women must live deeply before they can write helpfully. We cannot teach lessons we have not learned, and we cannot learn such lessons save in the school of experience.

MARCH 19

I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.—1 Cor. ix. 22.

SOME people have a happy faculty of always calling out the best that is in others. A shy person is made to feel at home in their presence, and at once loses his shyness. A bashful child is drawn out of his self-consciousness the moment he comes into their presence. The secret of this enviable power lies in sincere, unselfish interest. It is the winningness of love that woos out the best.

Here is a prayer for all:

"*May every soul that touches mine*
Be it the slightest contact get therefrom
some good,
Some little grace: one kindly thought,
One aspiration yet unfelt, one bit of cour-
age
For the darkening sky, one gleam of faith
To brave the thickening ills of life,
One glimpse of brightening skies, beyond
the gathering mists,
To make this life worth while,
And heaven a surer heritage."

Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven.—PROV. xxiii. 5.

PEOPLE ofttimes think that gold, silver, houses, lands, and stocks are the real treasures. So they toil for these things and gather them into their possession, and pile up what they suppose to be wealth. Thus they live like Nabobs in their fine houses, and call themselves millionaires. But one day their supposed riches take to themselves wings and fly away like eagles toward heaven. Or they may keep their wealth, perchance, and die at last in the midst of it, and have a great funeral; but then they find that they cannot carry a penny of it with them. "How much did he leave?" was asked about a rich man who had died. "He left all," was the answer. If men only knew that there are other things far more worth setting eyes and heart upon—things which will never fly away—they would pass by these glittering unrealities to lay hold of the true riches. We can lay up money in heaven only by using it for God.

She threw in two mites, which make a farthing.—MARK xii. 42.

IT is not the size of our achievement, as men see it, that makes its real value. A seed is a small thing, but it has in it a mysterious germ, and wherever it may fall it will grow into a beautiful thing. A secret lies hidden in many a quiet word or deed; it carries in it a germ of divine life.

"*What can I do to-day?*
Not praise to win, or glory to attain;
Not gold, or ease, or power, or love to gain,
Or pleasure gay;
But to impart
Joy to some stricken heart;
To send some heaven-born ray
Of hope, some sad, despairing
Soul to cheer;
To lift some weighing doubt;
Make truth more clear;
Dispel some dwarfing fear;
To lull some pain;
Bring to the fold again
Some lamb astray;
To brighten life for some one,
Now and here.
This let me do to-day."

Withhold not correction from the child. . . . Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell.—PROV. xxiii. 13, 14.

SOME parents and teachers have such gentle hearts that they cannot bear to correct a child lest they cause it pain. They forget that to leave in a child's heart an uncorrected fault, or to allow to grow up in its life unchecked any wrong tendency, is the greatest unkindness they could possibly do the child. To leave the roots of weeds growing in the garden among the flowers, is to insure the springing up of those weeds, by and by, to mar the beauty of the garden.

Any one should be glad to have a fault pointed out—not glad that the fault is there, but that it is now known, so that it may be put away. We should always deal with our discovered faults relentlessly. Even the right hand should be cut off, or the right eye plucked out, in order that the soul may be saved. Nor should any tender feeling ever prevent a parent or a teacher from trying to correct a fault in a child. Love must always seek the best.

Why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.—Acts i. 11.

PENSIVE gazing is never the best occupation. When our friends leave us we are not forbidden to sorrow, for it cannot be that hearts bereft can be without grief, but we are forbidden to sorrow in a way that breaks up our life of duty and service. I know a mother who lost a beloved daughter many years ago, who has done scarcely anything since but visit the cemetery and mourn. She dropped all her church work. Her home duties have been neglected. The living members of her family have received almost no care. She gazes up into heaven and weeps continually for her child. This is not how our Lord wishes us to act. He wants us to go back at once to our duties, thoughtful, reverent, and serious, yet earnest and faithful, witnessing by our faith and hope to the glory of our Saviour. The way He would have us show our grief is in more beautiful living, more earnest service and sweeter praise.

Length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honor.—PROV. iii. 16.

LONG life is not in itself a blessing. There is a legend of one who had a promise that the thing he asked for, whatever it might be, he would get. He prayed that he might not die, and his request was granted. He lived on and on. But he had forgotten to ask that he might not grow old, and so his gift became an intolerable burden. No doubt right living tends to longevity. Sin shortens life.

One year of wise and Christlike living, earnest and faithful, is better than ten years of selfishness and sin. "Riches and honor" are part of wisdom's portion. It may not be this world's riches and honor. True riches are those we can carry out of this world with us. Wisdom teaches us how to use even money so that it shall enrich us in eternity. What we keep and spend on ourselves we lose. What we give away in Christ's name is all we really make our own forever. What we sacrifice for Christ we shall find again and have forever.

Give therefore Thy servant an understanding heart to judge Thy people.—1 KINGS iii. 9.

SOLOMON wanted to rule wisely. He did not want to be a failure as a king. So he looked up into God's face and said, "Thou hast made me king. The work is great, and I am but a little child. Give me wisdom to be a good king." That was a noble choice. There is a great responsibility in being a preacher. But the responsibility of being a carpenter, a shoemaker, or a plumber, is great too. Hiram Golf was an old shoemaker, and he told the young minister that his shoemaking was just as religious a business as the preacher's preaching. If he should mend the shoes poorly, and the boy should catch cold and have pneumonia, he would be responsible. "I cannot afford, as a child of God, with a hope of heaven, to put poor work into that job, for much depends upon it. I would not like to meet that boy up yonder and have him tell me he had died because I was not a faithful shoemaker." All work is sacred, and we need God's help in the commonest occupations.

Solomon had forty thousand stalls of horses for his chariots.
—1 KINGS iv. 26.

SOLOMON was very rich. Everything was on the most magnificent scale. This made his reign very splendid, but in this luxury lurked danger. It is sad when in a community there is business prosperity while character is deteriorating. A poet says:

"*Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,*
Where wealth accumulates and men decay."

The luxury of Solomon's court, with the vast outlay of money, necessarily incurred heavy taxation, which soon became burdensome, and led ultimately to serious disaffection. An old legend says that in the heart of the staff on which Solomon leaned there was a worm which secretly was eating away the strength of the staff. The legend has its meaning in the fact that in Solomon's prosperity there lurked the insidious evil which, by and by, wrought ruin to the king's own character and disruption to his kingdom.

They took Absalom, and cast him into a great pit in the wood, and laid a very great heap of stones upon him.—2 SAM. xviii. 17.

IT has been said that every man lives for a funeral. That is, a man's funeral tells what kind of man he has been. Absalom had already built a splendid monument, which he meant should mark his grave. Instead, however, of being laid away to rest in honor by a weeping nation, beneath the shadows of a noble pile, his mangled body was hurled in dishonor into a pit and covered with stones. It was still true, however, that Absalom built his own monument. His own hand digged the grave of shame into which his body was cast. Sin's harvest is sure and terrible. Too many young men think it is unmanly to be good, true-hearted, and pure, and that a "fast life" is the manly one. We have, in the story of Absalom, an illustration of the career of one who lived such a life, and we must notice that the story is written out to its last chapter. The trouble too often is that men do not think of what the end will be.

When they had sung an hymn, they went out into the Mount of Olives.—MATT. xxvi. 30.

IT seems strange that Jesus could leave the upper room singing, when He knew what was before Him. But we have the explanation in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where we are told that it was for the joy set before Him that He endured the cross, despising the shame. We need not try to understand the mystery of the struggle in Gethsemane, but we may get some lessons from it. One is that the only true refuge in sorrow is prayer. Another is that we have a right to ask God to spare us from great trials. Another, that we may help our friends in their sorrow and suffering by our sympathy. Jesus expected to get strength from His disciples to enable Him to endure. One of the saddest incidents in the garden story is their failure to wake and watch with Him. A lesson for all time is in the Master's words at the last, "Sleep on now, and take your rest." There was no use in waking now—the traitor was coming. They had lost their opportunity to watch.

They . . . led Him away to crucify Him.—MATT. xxvii. 31.

NEVER was there such another procession as that which went along the Via Dolorosa that Good Friday morning. Jesus died that day for us.

"*Under an eastern sky,*
Amid a rabble cry,
A man went forth to die—
For me.

"*Thorn-crowned His blessed head,*
Blood-stained His every tread,
Cross-laden, on He sped—
For me."

There was human pity at the cross; medicated wine was offered the Sufferer by gentle hands. But He refused to take the stupefying draught. He would not lessen in the smallest degree His pain as the world's Redeemer, and He would not enter the great mystery of death with faculties dulled. Terrible as were the sufferings of Christ on His cross, we think of Him not with pity, but with adoration. What we see is the Lamb of God bearing the sin of the world.

MARCH 30

My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?—MATT. xxvii. 46.

THE most stupendous scene ever witnessed on the earth was the dying of Jesus Christ. It is a comfort to other sufferers who are staggered by the mystery of their sorrows to know that even Jesus, for a time at least, on His cross, could not find His Father's face in the darkness. Yet in His feeling of forsakenness His faith did not fail.

"*He said 'Forsaken.' Then doubt is not sin.*
But 'tis to stand in the night, and within
Feel, for a while, as if day could not win.

"*His cure was this—to hold fast through the night,*
Though bowed and blind with the dust of the fight,
God; God as 'My God,' unseen, but my right."

Love came out now in bold confession, and He slept those three days in a rich man's tomb, in a garden, with the spring flowers blooming all about Him.

MARCH 31

He is not here: for He is risen.—MATT. xxviii. 6.

CHRIST died in love for us. But if He had only died, and had not risen again, His sacrifice would not have availed for us. If He could not conquer death for Himself, He could not be our Saviour. But the grave could not hold Him. When the women came they found the stone rolled away, and the angel watcher said to them, "He is risen." We have for a Saviour one who fought every battle that we have to fight, and was always victorious. He is able, therefore, to deliver us in any conflict.

Jesus appeared often enough after He arose to convince all His friends that He had really risen. Then He went back to heaven to receive all authority. His last act was to send out His disciples, bidding them to win all nations for Him. That was a strange commission for One who had died on a cross to give to a dozen plain peasants. It was a stupendous claim to make for Himself, that all authority over the nations was now His. But so it was.

APRIL 1

They entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus. —LUKE xxiv. 3.

SUPPOSE they had found the body there —what would have been the result? That would have meant that Christ was still holden in the clasp of death. They were disappointed at not finding the body, but in this disappointment lay the glorious hope out of which all our Christian joys come today. We get from this a lesson of comfort, to give cheer to our own hearts when we stand by the graves of our Christian dead. The body of our loved one may be in the grave, but he, the friend we knew and loved, is not there; he is with his Lord. In describing death, St. Paul speaks of it as "absent from the body, at home with the Lord." You go to the old house where your friend used to live. You find that he has moved away to a new house on the hill. You stand by the form of your dead. Your friend is not there; he has gone away. Where is he? He has left the old tattered tabernacle and dwells in the house not made with hands.

APRIL 2

Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen.—LUKE xxiv. 5, 6.

THE empty tomb teaches wonderful lessons. As we stand by it, we are assured, first, that Jesus died. He was certainly dead, for Pilate had official inquiry made, and received assurance of the fact before he would grant leave for the burial. If any doubt had existed concerning His death, there could be none after the soldier had thrust the spear into His side. Here are the pieces of fine linen which gentle hands had wound round the limbs. Here is the napkin which covered His face, lying, neatly folded, by itself. Look closely at the place, for He was here —He was dead.

It is very important that we get this truth well fixed in our minds, for on Christ's death our redemption depends. But He is not now in His grave. There is no dead form lying there where He lay yesterday. The grave is empty, and it whispers a blessed truth to the Christian. Jesus rose; so shall all who sleep in Him rise from their graves when He comes again.

APRIL 3

But their eyes were holden that they should not know Him.
—LUKE xxiv. 16.

THERE is a picture of a woman in great sorrow. She is sitting beside the sea, looking out upon the dark waters which have swallowed down her heart's treasures. Close behind her is an angel with his harp, whose strings he is gently touching. But the woman is not aware of the angel's presence and is uncomforted by the music of the celestial harp. So it ofttimes is with mourners when Jesus Himself comes to give them consolation. In their grief they are unaware of His presence and deaf to His words of love.

We go afar in quest of Christ, while all the time He is close beside us. "Sir Launfal wandered over all the earth in search of the Holy Grail; and when at last, after long years had flown, he returned aged and bent to his old home, lo! there under his own castle walls did he find the object of his search. So often we will find close by us, in the Scriptures we already possess, in the circumstances in which we are placed, the help we are seeking and the truth we need."

APRIL 4

They constrained Him, saying, Abide with us.—LUKE xxiv. 29.

IF they had not thus constrained Him, He would have passed on. Think what the disciples would have missed in the blessed revealing at the table if He had not gone in with them. We do not know how many of the best things of divine love we miss continually because of the languidness of our praying. We ask and receive not, because we ask with so little urgency. We seek and find not, because we seek so languidly and give up so soon. We knock, and the door is not opened to us, because we knock only lightly and indifferently, and then go away.

This incident suggested the words of the hymn with which we are so familiar:

"*Abide with me; fast falls the eventide;*
The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide;
When other helpers fail, and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, O abide with me!"

APRIL 5

They came, . . . bringing the spices which they had prepared.—LUKE xxiv. 1.

THEY supposed that His body still lay in the tomb, and they wished to honor it. It was a beautiful sentiment which sought thus to show love's tender regard for the departed. It was fitting to pile fragrant spices in the tomb, to fill the place with their sweet odors. In like manner, friends lay flowers upon the coffins of their beloved dead in our own time. Sometimes, it is true, this manner of honoring the dead runs to excess. Yet the custom is too beautiful to be lost. Let us lay our flowers upon the coffins of our beloved, and let us make them only fit expressions of regard and affection.

Then let us not forget to put flowers upon the pathways of our friends while they live. It is a poor affection that allows hearts to starve for want of kindness through the years, and then sends flowers to be laid on the coffin. It is pleasant to remember that Mary broke her alabaster box to anoint Him *beforehand* for His burying.

APRIL 6

That disciple therefore whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord.—JOHN xxi. 7.

WE all have some friend whom we can identify anywhere by his acts. Among a hundred voices we know the voice of the one who is dear to us. Even the step on the street or on the pavement outside we know from within, though we see not the face or the form, and our heart promptly says, "That is his step." Are we so quick to recognize Christ by the blessings He brings to us? Every success in business ought to awe and impress us and lead us to say, "It is the Lord." Every time a blessing comes to us we ought to remember that there is an unseen One standing veiled close beside us, that it is Jesus Himself from whose hands the gift of love comes. Indeed, He is in every providence of our lives. Some of these providences are dark and perplexing, yet always the strange Form, standing in the dim twilight, is the Lord. Do we always recognize him? If we did, would it not oft-times quiet our fears and bring peace to our hearts?

APRIL 7

Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.—MATT. vi. 20.

THE first way to lay up treasures in heaven is to give ourselves to Christ. We then shall have an inheritance laid up there, reserved for us, to be given to us when we get home. Another way is to live a life of love. If we serve those who need in the name of Christ, we shall receive a reward. Thus we lay up treasure in heaven in every act of self-denial, in every service of love. If we have our treasure in heaven we need not be anxious. Jesus says that God cares for the birds, and He will much more surely care for His children. He bids us live by the day, not vexing ourselves about to-morrow's needs, for when to-morrow comes it will bring its own supply and its own blessing. Some people take a great deal of trouble in looking after other people's lives. Jesus tells us that we really have nothing to do with the faults and mistakes of others. We do not have to answer for them. The only person we should judge is ourself. If we keep our own life right, we shall have quite enough to do.

APRIL 8

It is not for you to know the times or the seasons.—Acts i. 7.

THE disciples were anxious to know about the future, to have a sort of programme or chart of the coming years. They were somewhat inclined to speculation. Jesus taught them that they had nothing to do with the times and seasons, which were in the Father's authority. They did not need to trouble themselves about these things.

The lesson is important for all of us. There are things it is better we should not know beforehand. Indeed, it is a merciful provision that we cannot see into the future. If we could see the sorrows, struggles, defeats, and trials that we shall have to meet before we get home, our bright days would be saddened by anticipation of these things. As it is, we go on, unconscious of shadows that lie before us, living as if all were clear and bright, trusting God for the future. Then when we come to the hard points, God gives us grace to meet them. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

APRIL 9

They were all filled with the Holy Ghost.—Acts ii. 4.

IT was a stupendous event that occurred on the day of Pentecost. It was the coming of the Holy Spirit to dwell in every human heart that will receive Him. It was not a wind that made the sound the disciples heard—it was the breath of God breathing upon the little company. It was not fire which sat upon their heads, but an appearance, "like as of fire," which really was the flame of the divine Spirit, touching and consecrating the believers in Christ. The explanation of the wonderful scene is given in the words, "They were all filled with the Holy Ghost." The breath of God meant life, and the fire of God meant cleansing, quickening, and transformation. What took place that day may become true of every one of us today—we may be filled with the Holy Spirit. If we are, we shall speak the speech of love, of grace, of peace. It is the duty of every Christian to be filled with the divine Spirit. Then we shall have power, and our lives will begin to be blessings in the world.

APRIL 10

Such as I have give I thee.—Acts iii. 6.

THE lame man, in asking alms, thought only of receiving bits of money. It seemed kindness to give him what he asked. There were no hospitals or homes in those days for the crippled, and the only way for them to live, if poor, was to beg. Christianity teaches us that we should be kind to all in distress. Peter and John did not fail in this duty. First, they treated him in a Christian way. A Russian writer tells of meeting a beggar one day. He felt in all his pockets and then said, "I am sorry, brother, that I have nothing to give you." The beggar thanked him and said he had done more for him than if he had given him silver: he had called him "brother." These apostles treated the lame man as a brother. Then, instead of giving him silver and gold, they healed him. Was not that better than any alms they could have given? Money would have supported him a little longer in his beggary—what they did made it unnecessary for him to sit at the gate begging any longer.

APRIL 11

We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.—Acts iv. 20.

ONE of the Beatitudes is, "Blessed are ye when men shall reproach you, and persecute you." The first Christians very soon had opportunity to receive this blessing. Their behavior in persecution has its lessons for us. One is that we should give to Christ the honor of all that we do.

Another lesson is, that we should always take our commands from Christ and from no other. The apostles were bidden to speak no more in Christ's name. Their answer was heroic: "We cannot but speak." We may find it hard sometimes to obey Christ—it is easier to keep silent than to speak for Him. But we have no choice if we would remain loyal to Him.

We have also here a lesson in prayer. The apostles did not pray to be delivered from suffering. They prayed that they might have power to speak the word with boldness. We should not pray to be kept from suffering, but that we may be brave and loyal in His service.

Distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.—Acts iv. 35.

THE law of Christian love is the law of Christian life. He who loves Christ will love his brother also. This law of love ruled in the first Christian society. "The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and soul." They were bound together as members of one family. This was not merely in sentiment, but it took a very practical form, for "not one of them said that aught of the things which he possessed was his own." This does not mean that all property rights were surrendered, but that if one had need the other who had plenty shared what he had with him. Any case of distress of which we become aware makes its appeal to us and we must consider it. A little child was overheard saying in her evening prayer: "Lord, I saw a poor little girl to-day. Her feet were almost on the ground. She looked cold and hungry. But, Lord, it isn't any of my business—is it?" But it is our business when we find any one suffering or in distress. We are to bear each other's burdens.

That at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them.—Acts v. 15.

THE incident of Peter's shadow illustrates the power of unconscious influence. It was not the shadow that had healing power, but the people's faith that in this way God would work cures. Every one carries about him an invisible shadow which affects the lives on which it falls. If our lives are true and good, our influence is good. But if our lives are not good, we still have influence, and in this case it is baleful. There is a legend of a good man for whom was asked some new power. He chose that he might do a great deal of good and might not be aware of it. So it was ordered that when his shadow fell behind him, where he could not see it, it should have healing power, but when it fell before him, so that he could see it, it should have no such effect. If we would have our influence full of healing, a blessing to others, we must be humble and lowly, earnest believers in Christ, full of the Spirit of God.

They stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.—Acts vii. 59.

STEPHEN'S speech was only a fragment. The members of the court listened quietly until he came to speak of the temple. Stephen saw the outbreak coming and hastened to his charges against the rulers. In contrast with the rage of the judges, Stephen's calmness was remarkable. He looked up into heaven with steady gaze, and had a wonderful vision. The heavens were opened, and he saw Jesus. He was standing, having risen up to deliver and help His servant on the earth. Heaven is not far from earth, and Christ is nigh when we are in trouble. The court became a wild mob, and Stephen was dragged out and stoned. As the stones were hurled at him, he sank upon his knees and prayed. He called upon Jesus to receive his spirit. For a Christian, dying is only the spirit passing into the hands of Christ. After that he prayed for his murderers. Then he fell asleep. One man who saw all this never forgot it—Saul.

APRIL 15

Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?—Acts ix. 6.

THE story of Paul's conversion is wonderful. He was the fiercest of the persecutors. When he set out for Damascus he was "breathing threatening and slaughter against the disciples." Yet the picture of Stephen's murder never faded from his vision, and at last did much to bring him to Christ's feet.

"*Saint, did I say? with your remembered faces,*
Dear men and women, whom I sought and slew.
Ah! when we mingle in the heavenly places,
How will I weep to Stephen and to you!

"*Oh for the strain that rang to our reviling*
Still, when the bruised limbs sank upon the sod!
Oh for the eyes that looked their last in smiling,
Last on this world here, but their first on God!"

It is earnestness like Paul's that the Church needs to-day.

APRIL 16

Peter passed throughout all quarters.—Acts ix. 32.

IT is a great thing to be an encourager of others. Peter went about helping the new believers. There are always young Christians without experience who need just such aid. A brave word from one who is older gives them courage to go on. Peter "found" Æneas. That means that he heard of his pitiable condition and sought him out. We should not wait till people ask for comfort and help. Peter kept himself in the background and said to the man, "Jesus Christ healeth thee." If we were to do all our Christian work in this way it would have far more power.

Dorcas had won a place in people's hearts by her kindness. She was "full of good works and almsdeeds which she did." She did not merely mean to do them—she "did" them.

In restoring her, Peter first bade her arise, and then gave her his hand to help her rise. This is important in all our helping of others. We must give our hand as well as speak the word of power.

The men of Judah came, and there they anointed David king.—2 SAM. ii. 4.

DAVID had been a long time in preparation for his place. When only a boy he was anointed, but he was not fit then to be a king. He was taken to Saul's court, where he learned much about the ways of kings. The envy of Saul seemed a bitter thing to break into such a happy career as David's. But this too had its place in his training. It taught him patience and self-control. It forced him out among the people, away from luxury and refinement, into caves and mountains, where he learned how the common people lived, and was taught sympathy with men in their hardships and trials. He was a better king afterward, because of his long years of persecution and exile. In these and in other ways was David made ready for his duties as king. We must not think it strange if we are called to endure trials, temptations, hardships, and suffering in our earlier years, for it is in this way that God would train us for noble character and for larger usefulness.

The king said, . . . Where is he? . . . Then king David sent, and fetched him.—2 SAM. ix. 4, 5.

THIS showed David's disinterestedness. This poor lame man could not be of any use to him. It was the pure friendship of David's heart for Jonathan that hungered to show kindness to some one who had belonged to Jonathan. Friendship is true just in proportion as it is disinterested. If we care for a person and do things for him only for what we expect or hope to get in return, let us not desecrate the sacred name of friendship by applying it to our regard. We must love our friends for their sake, not for our own.

There is really very much disinterested love in this world. We see it in many homes where an invalid wife, child, brother or sister, is loved and cared for by the whole household with almost divine tenderness. The misfortune that mars the beauty and makes the loved one a burden, not a help, only makes the love the stronger, truer, gentler. All friendship must have the same disinterestedness.

Absalom rose up early. . . . Thy matters are . . . right; but there is no man deputed . . . to hear thee.—2 SAM. xv. 2, 3.

ABSALOM perverted good things to base and ignoble uses. For example, early rising is a good thing, when one rises to begin a day of beautiful living. Absalom rose early to ply his arts of treachery.

Sympathy is a good thing. One can do no Christlier work than to go among those who are overwrought, speaking cheering, strengthening words. To take by the hand one who has fallen in some misfortune, and be a brother to him, helping him to rise, is a noble thing to do. But Absalom only pretended to be the people's friend that he might get their confidence and then use them in his wicked plot to seize his father's throne. He lost no opportunity, when any one was dissatisfied, to pity him, and hint how different it would be if only he were king. There is no baser treachery than this, and we all need to be on our guard continually, lest, by half-conscious disparagement, we destroy the influence of others and do them irreparable injury.

He . . . charged him to build an house for the Lord.—1 CHRON. xxii. 6.

DAVID was an old man about to die. He had to leave unfinished the great work on which he had set his heart. So Moses died on the edge of the Promised Land. Raphael's wonderful painting of the Transfiguration is an unfinished work. Buckle, the historian, dying in the midst of his years, cried out, "My book! my book!" He had planned a great history of civilization, of which two volumes only were finished. Disraeli, though full of years and of honors, was heard to utter as his last words, "I am overwhelmed!" He was thinking of the great purposes of his life not yet achieved. So David was not permitted to see his life-plan accomplished.

It is a great comfort to a good father to have a son to whom he can commit his unfinished work, with confidence that the trust will be faithfully executed. It ought to be the highest ambition of the sons of a good father to continue his influence and his work, to build up the house he has planned.

Thou hast showed unto Thy servant David my father great mercy.—1 KINGS iii. 6.

SOLOMON felt an obligation to be worthy because of the blessing God had shown to his father. We often talk of the responsibility of parents for their children, but we should think also of the responsibility of children for their parents.

Before David died he gave Solomon some advice: "Be thou strong therefore, and show thyself a man, . . . that the Lord may establish His word which He spake concerning me." The fulfilment of God's promises to David would depend upon Solomon's faithfulness. What David had done was but the beginning; it was Solomon's mission to take up and continue his work.

An honored parentage is a good heritage. It puts one under tremendous responsibility, too, for its blessings are a sacred trust which must be kept unsullied, and accounted for. To be unfaithful in such circumstances is not only to leave our work undone, but to mar, possibly destroy, the good work of others which had been put into our hands to finish.

APRIL 22

When Solomon had finished the building of the house of the Lord, and the king's house, and all Solomon's desire.—1 KINGS ix. 1.

THERE is a measure of moral safety in work. While Solomon was busy he was in less danger of being led away from God. At length, however, his magnificent projects were all completed, and he was ready to enjoy the ease and the fame which he had earned in his years of wonderful activity. Instead, however, of being a time of security, this was his time of greatest danger. There is peril in popularity. It brings flattery which ofttimes becomes almost adoration. One who is so honored does not always remain humble and lowly. Then Solomon's leisure brought danger. So Solomon was now in a perilous condition. He was not conscious, however, of his danger, and this made it all the worse.

Life is full of unsuspected perils, and our safety lies in committing the keeping of our souls to God, who sees every hidden peril. Then, if we would help toward our own security, we must keep hand and heart full of the Master's work.

For whom the Lord loveth He correcteth.—PROV. iii. 12.

WE are apt to put it just the other way. "My father does not love me, or he would not be so severe with me," a boy says. Then he points to another boy whose father lets his son do as he pleases, and never restrains or corrects him. "That father loves his boy, and is always kind to him," he says. So it may seem just at the time. But to be left without discipline, to have no chastening, no correction, no restraining or withholding, is not a proof of love. A father who does thus with his son is letting him go to destruction unhindered. The one who corrects and chastens is intent on saving his son. Chastening is, therefore, a proof of love. God chastens us because He wants to save us and make something of us.

It should be a comfort to us to know, when we have trials or afflictions, that instead of being a proof that God does not love us, it is just the reverse—a new assurance of our heavenly Father's tender affection and deep interest in us.

APRIL 24

He saith unto them, Come ye after Me, and I will make you fishers of men.—MATT. iv. 19.

WE must be ready to break any ties which Christ bids us to break, in order to become one with Him. We must become His disciples before we can become workers.

The first thing always is personal attachment to Christ, the disengaging of ourselves from all other masters, and the devoting of ourselves altogether to Him.

When we have entered His company we receive from His hand a work to do. The world is like a deep, black sea, its black waters of sin being full of lost souls. The work of Christ and His followers is to draw these lost ones out of the dark floods and save them. Sometimes the waters in which these lost ones lie are very foul, but we ought not to shrink from our work on this account. Christ Himself went down into the blackest waters of sin to find and save the lost. Once He drew out a "woman that was a sinner"; another time it was a publican; again it was a thief dying on a cross.

APRIL 25

A prophet hath no honor in his own country.—JOHN iv. 44.

THOSE who live in familiar relations with the great or the good are least likely to recognize the elements of greatness or goodness in them. Many of the men whose names shine in the galaxy of fame, and whose work lives in the world with undying influence, had little honor from those among whom they walked, and perhaps would have little honor to-day if they were to return and live among us.

We ofttimes fail to recognize the true worth of our best friends while they stay with us. It is not until she is gone out of the home that a mother's real value is appreciated. The same is true of each member of a household and of each friend upon whom we lean much and whose life is a great deal to us. Jesus walked among the people, taught, wrought miracles, and lived out His sweet, beautiful life of love, but they failed to see the Messiah in Him. "He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not."

APRIL 26

My Father worketh even until now, and I work.—JOHN v. 17.

GOD keeps no Sabbath. He never ceases to be active. The worlds do not stop in their orbits to rest when the holy day begins. The grass does not stop growing, the flowers do not cease to bloom, the wheat does not pause in its ripening when the day of rest comes. There is no Sabbath-keeping in God's providence. His care for His children does not intermit when the Sabbath dawns upon the world. The people found fault with Jesus for healing a man on the Sabbath. This was His answer: "My Father worketh even until now—has never ceased to work in blessing and helping His creatures." Then He added, "And I work." This was in answer to the charge that He had broken the Sabbath in healing the man. We also get here a hint of the kind of works that are right for us to do on the Lord's Day. There is not a shadow of defence here for ordinary secular work on the Lord's Day, but works of mercy, of religion, we may do on the day of rest.

The Father . . . hath given all judgment unto the Son.—JOHN v. 22.

IT is a precious comfort to us, as we think of the Judgment Day, to know that the Judge on the throne will be the same Jesus who died for us, who wears still and shall then wear our nature. We need not fear Him who once died for love of us.

If we are His friends now and here, confessing Him before all men, He will be our Friend then, and will confess us before His Father and the angels.

We must remember that He who is to be our Judge makes common cause with the lowliest of His people, and will say to them, "I was an hungered and ye gave Me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me drink: I was sick, and ye visited Me"; or, "I was an hungered, and ye gave Me no meat: I was sick, and ye visited Me not." We need to watch how we treat the lowliest of our fellow-men.

"*Hush, I pray you!*
What if this friend should happen to be
—God?"

Jesus therefore took the loaves; and having given thanks, He distributed to them that were set down.—JOHN vi. 11.

WE ought to pray continually that Christ's touch may be upon us and upon the things we are doing. It is instructive to think of the responsibility of the disciples that day. If they had merely fed themselves with what Jesus gave into their hands, the hungry thousands would not have been fed. It is just as important that we, into whose hands Christ gives the blessings of the gospel, shall pass them on to those who are round us. If we only feed ourselves, take the comfort and the grace for our own lives, and do not pass on the broken bread, we have disappointed Christ and have failed in our duty as His helpers and co-workers. Or if the disciples had begun feeding the people with what they had, without bringing it to the Master, it would not have gone far. We must bring our paltry resources to Christ, and put them into His hands. When we have done this, no one can tell the measure of good which may be wrought.

Work . . . for the meat which abideth unto eternal life.—JOHN vi. 27.

BUNYAN gives a picture of a man with a muck-rake, working hard, scraping up the rubbish under his feet, not seeing the crown that hangs in the air above his head. It is a picture of many people in this world. They are toiling and wearing out their life in gathering rubbish out of the dust, not thinking of the divine gifts, the spiritual things, that are in Christ, and which they might have with half the toil and care.

"*Bubbles we buy with a whole soul's tasking;*
'Tis heaven alone that is given away,
'Tis only God may be had for the asking."

We ought not to spend our life in picking up things we cannot carry beyond the grave. If we are wise, we shall seek rather to gather treasures we can take with us into eternity. When we take Christ into our heart, we eat the meat which abideth unto eternal life.

APRIL 30

The bread of God is that which cometh down out of heaven, and giveth life unto the world.—JOHN vi. 33.

NOTHING that grows out of the soil will feed our souls. We were made for God, and must feed our immortal nature on heavenly bread. There is a story of a pilgrim, crossing the desert and famishing for bread, who came upon a bag of pearls lying in the sand. He hoped the bag contained food, and eagerly opened it. But he flung it from him in bitter disappointment, saying, "It is only pearls, and I am starving for bread." What pearls are to a starving man—a bitter mockery—the riches and honors of this world are to a human spirit in its times of sore need, as when the sense of sin overwhelms the soul, when a great sorrow has come into the life. Nothing but bread will satisfy hunger. Nothing but Christ will meet the needs and cravings of a soul in its times of distress.

"*Art thou weary, art thou languid,*
Art thou sore distress'd?
'Come to Me,' saith One, 'and coming,
Be at rest.'"

MAY 1

He that believeth on Me shall never thirst.—JOHN vi. 35.

CHRIST can satisfy all our hungers and thirsts. He does not crush them. Some people imagine that the cravings of their heart are sinful and must be destroyed. But that is not what Christ proposes to do. He says our thirsts shall all be satisfied. These yearnings and desires are really the marks of the divine likeness in us. They are our capacities for lofty attainments and achievements. They are like the buds of the trees in the early spring days: they were made to burst out into full bloom and to come to glorious fruitage. In earth's short summer, even at the best, only a few of these capacities find time to grow into beauty; but in the other life there will be abundance of time for every yearning and longing, every taste and desire, every aspiration and hope, to reach full and perfect growth.

"*I came to Jesus, and I drank*
Of that life-giving stream;
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
And now I live in Him."

MAY 2

Where I am, ye cannot come.—JOHN vii. 34.

HE was going to a place into which only His friends could come, only the good, those who belonged by renewed life to His kingdom. Jesus says this same word to all who reject Him now as Saviour and Friend. Heaven is represented as a city with walls. Walls mean exclusion. There are some who will be shut out of that holy place. But there are twelve gates by which to enter the heavenly city. These gates into the holy place where Christ is are always open, not shut by day or by night. Christ does not want men to be kept away from Him; He wants them to come to Him. Every voice of the gospel bids them come. But there is no way of getting to Christ where He is but by being like Him. The unholy cannot find their way to Him until their hearts have been changed. The only way to make sure of being with Christ in blessedness is to accept His grace and love in the "little while" that He stands before our doors. Then we shall be forever with Him, and nothing shall ever separate us from Him.

MAY 3

Moses said unto the people, Ye have sinned a great sin: and now I will go up unto the Lord; peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin. —Exod. xxxii. 30.

IT was a terrible sin. The people had broken their covenant with God. There was only one hope: Moses would intercede for them. When we break our covenants with God we have the same way—and it is the only way—to get back into God's favor.

It is pleasant to have human friends who will go up into the mount of prayer and plead with God for forgiveness when we have sinned. We never can know what blessings come to us, and what sufferings are averted, through the intercession of our friends. Job offered sacrifices unto God for his children, lest they in their carelessness might have incurred the divine displeasure.

But, precious and valuable to us as are our human mediators, there is something better yet: Jesus Christ ever lives to make intercession for us. When we have sinned, if we turn to Him, He will plead for us and obtain mercy and forgiveness.

MAY 4

This is it that the Lord spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me.—LEV. x. 3.

THE priests who refused to honor the Lord by doing what He had commanded, fell at the tabernacle door, struck down by their own sin. The law of God has always a double aspect. From one side it appears bright and full of promise and blessing; from the other side it is dark and full of terrors. It is like the pillar of cloud which led the people as they left Egypt. It was light on the side toward the Israelites, and dark toward the Egyptians. Law obeyed gives shelter, blessing, and peace. Law disobeyed brings terror, suffering, and death. The same is true even of the gospel of Christ. To those who accept the gospel it gives everlasting life; to those who reject it, it becomes a curse, because the offering of it adds to their guilt when they have rejected it. Every blessing that comes to us presents to us this double aspect—it will leave us either with more of God's light shining upon us, or with deeper darkness resting over us.

They . . . cut down . . . a branch with one cluster of grapes, and they bare it between two upon a staff.—NUM. xiii. 23.

GOD has sent over into our earthly wilderness-life many samples of the good things of the heavenly life—foretastes of the full glories there awaiting us. The joy, peace, love, and grace we get here are very sweet, but they are just little specimens of fruits that grow everywhere in the Better Land. The old rabbis say that when the famine began in Egypt and the storehouses were opened, Joseph threw the chaff of the grain upon the Nile, that it might float down on the river and show those who lived below that there was abundance of provision laid up for them farther up the river. So the blessings of divine grace which we enjoy in this world are little more than the husks of the heavenly good things, sent down on the river of divine grace as foretastes or intimations of what is in store for us in heaven. The joy the Christian has here is deep and rich, but heaven's joy is infinitely deeper and richer.

These words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart.—DEUT. vi. 6.

THERE is a story in one of the sacred books of the Hindus of a devotee who had served a certain goddess with such faithfulness that she offered to give him whatever he might ask. She offered him lands and wealth beyond price, but the man said, "Alas! I have no need of such things. I already have great estates, abundance of silver and gold, and all the good things of this life. But I am a miser. I cannot enjoy the things I possess. I die of famine, with plenty all around me, and I know nothing of the pleasures that are common to generous minds. Give me, then, a new heart." The goddess looked at him in amazement, and said, "Thou hast asked a thing too difficult," and she vanished. But this is the very thing God does for those who ask it. He is able to change the miser's heart, so that he may find pleasure in blessing others with his gifts. He does this by putting His words into the heart. Then the heart is changed, and the life that was all wrong is made all right.

MAY 7

When thou shalt have eaten and be full; then beware lest thou forget the Lord.—DEUT. vi. 11, 12.

THE people were going to a country which had long been possessed by a nation who had built cities, filled fine houses with good things, and planted vineyards. All these things the Lord would give to them. They would not have to erect houses nor plant orchards of their own. But the danger was that when they had received all these things they would forget that they were gifts from God and would turn away into sin. We are not to forget the Giver as we enjoy the gifts.

Children that receive from their parents many good things are ofttimes ungrateful, forgetting through what toil and sacrifice these blessings have been prepared for them. It is better for us to work ourselves for the things we get, and then we shall know their value and ever be grateful to God for them. It is always a perilous thing to forget God. To forget any friend who has been good to us is a base sin. But to forget God, to whom we owe every blessing, is the worst of all.

MAY 8

Sanctify yourselves: for to-morrow the Lord will do wonders among you.—JOSH. iii. 5.

TO sanctify means to cleanse, to make holy. God will not send His gifts to others in unclean vessels. Every morning, as we set out, we have promises for help, but these promises are dependent upon ourselves. We must be in a proper frame of heart and mind to receive them. God will not put His holy gifts into our hands if they are defiled with sin. The lesson is for all of us, as we go to God in prayer, or as we ask for blessing. If, while we pray, our hearts are cherishing sins unconfessed and unrepented of, we cannot hope that God will grant our requests. Our Lord said Himself that if we bring our gifts to the altar and there remember that our brother has aught against us, we must leave our gift unoffered before the altar, and go and be reconciled with our brother, and then come and offer our gift. An old psalm says that if we regard iniquity in our heart the Lord will not hear us. The secret of many unanswered prayers may be found in cherished sins.

They took up the ark of the covenant, and went before the people.—JOSH. iii. 6.

THE ark was the symbol of God's own presence. God is always ready to lead us. To go without Him into life's experiences, is to fail.

A little way back, when instructions were given for this crossing, Joshua said to the people, "You have not passed this way heretofore, and therefore you must keep in sight of the ark which will go before you." The same may be said of every day's experiences. We have not passed this way heretofore. Although we have lived thousands of other days, each new day presents an unknown pathway to us, a way we have never goen over before. The only safe thing to do is always to keep the ark in sight, and to follow it.

One of the marks of the true Christian is that he follows Christ. Christ's sheep know His voice and follow Him, and He goeth before them. Children should learn in their earliest years that Christ is their Leader, and that every morning they can put their hand in His for guidance for the day.

When Joab saw that the front of the battle was against him before and behind, he chose of all the choice men.—2 SAM. x. 9.

THIS is a picture of our condition in this world. Whichever way we move we find enemies facing us. Joab teaches us a lesson in the art of war. He prepared to assault both the foes in the front and those in the rear. He turned no back to any enemy. This would seem to teach that the Christian should never expose his back to the foe, but should always keep his face toward him.

Another good lesson from Joab's movements is, his picking out his best men to fight the hardest battle, to meet the most dangerous foes. Our great Captain gives His best soldiers His hardest fighting to do. If any of us think we have sorer temptations than others have, that the enemies who come against us are harder to overcome than those our neighbors have to meet, let us remember that Christ picks His soldiers, putting the best and bravest where the battle will be hardest.

Oh that I were made judge, . . . that every man . . . might come unto me, and I would do him justice!—2 SAM. XV. 4.

IT is very easy to criticise others and imagine how much better we would do if we were in their place. First Absalom poisoned the people's minds toward David by making the impression that the king was neglectful, and that the people were suffering wrong through his neglect; next he suggested how different matters would be if he were judge in his father's place. The treachery of such words we can see. He cared nothing for the people's real or imaginary wrongs. He thought only of destroying their confidence in David and winning them to himself.

There always are people who think of no way of getting up but by pulling others down. It is very easy for any of us, by careless words, and even unintentionally, to disparage others and indirectly suggest how much better we would perform their duties if they were ours. It requires a noble heart and most watchful care to be always loyal to our friends.

Therefore I will give thanks unto thee, O Lord.—2 SAM. xxii. 50.

THE keynote of David's hymn is praise. He saw God's hand in all the events of his life. God had girded him with strength; God had made his enemies turn their backs; God had delivered him from the strivings of the people. Great military men sometimes write autobiographies glorifying themselves, explaining how this and that battle was won, showing how their valor or their strategy was the secret of the success on this or that field, thus weaving for themselves a crown of honor. David's autobiography is altogether different. He hides himself away and honors God.

It is only when we are willing to be nothing that God may be all in all, that we become really great spiritually. We are but the earthen vessels that God fills with blessing. No matter how much good we may do in this world, it is not we that really do it, but God through us and in us. Just so far, then, as we recognize this truth do we reach the highest possible spirit in Christian life.

MAY 13

Even as I sware unto thee, . . . even so will I certainly do this day.—1 KINGS i. 30.

DAVID had sworn to Bathsheba that her son Solomon should reign as king. He now declares to her that his oath will be sacredly kept. One of the marks of the man who shall abide in God's presence, is, "He sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not."

Too many persons find it very easy to said they would do. Pledges sit very lightly "forget" to do what they have solemnly upon them. Vows are thoughtlessly made, and just as thoughtlessly broken. There should be no need for an oath—one's simple word should be held irrevocably binding—just as binding as one's most solemn oath. Forgetfulness is no excuse for failing to keep promises. If our memory is defective, we should put down our promises in writing, and keep them so before our minds that it will be impossible for us to forget them.

One who can be implicitly relied upon, who never fails any one who trusts in him, is like a fragment of the Rock of Ages.

Zadok the priest took an horn of oil out of the tabernacle, and anointed Solomon.—1 KINGS i. 39.

OIL was the symbol of the Holy Spirit. The meaning of the ceremony was that as men anointed the young king with oil, so God would anoint him with divine grace, setting him apart as king, gifting him for service. God anoints every one of us, as we wait at His feet in consecration, giving us His Holy Spirit to fit us for His work.

It is related of a Russian prince that he was in Paris, having for his companions certain rich young men who passed their time in revelling. One night they were feasting, and in the midst of their revels a sealed message was handed to the Russian prince. He opened and read it, and then rising, he said to his companions, "I am emperor now." He then turned away and left them, separating himself forever from his past unworthy life.

When we are called to any duty we should break with whatever in our past has been unworthy. The call to holy service should be a call to noble living.

God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart.—1 KINGS iv. 29.

WE must notice here first it was God who gave Solomon these gifts which meant so much to him in his career as king. His wisdom and understanding were not simply the results of his own study, thought, and experience. Of course, men get wisdom through experience. Study and reading give men knowledge of books and develop their mental power. But we must remember that whatever gifts of mind or heart we possess have been bestowed upon us by God Himself.

We should always think of Him as the owner of our life, with all its powers and possibilities. This should inspire in us gratitude to God. Then it should lead us to use all our faculties and powers in the service of God. So long as Solomon did this he was blessed. It was through the influence of luxury that his heart was drawn away from God and he began to fall. No sin can be more terrible than the perversion of great gifts from right to wrong uses.

The Lord my God hath given me rest on every side.—1 KINGS v. 4.

THIS was part of the preparation for the building of the temple. Times of quiet in one's life should not be idle times. There is other work to do then. These are days for temple-building. True living is not all activity—struggle, conflict, gathering money, toiling with one's hands. Building of character is the great work of life. This goes on best in the quiet. We ought not to wait for idleness to compel us to be still; we should get the quiet into our life even in our busiest times. We must have a restful spirit if we would build up the inner temple. There should be "silent times" in every day's life.

The secret of Daniel's noble character, while carrying a great part of the burden of the kingdom of Babylon was that he never forsook the place of prayer. Not even fear of the lion's den could make him neglect devotion. There is no other secret of a true and noble life amid the world's strifes and trials. We must keep quiet within, that we may build up in our hearts the temple of God.

Turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the Lord.—1 KINGS xi. 4.

THE trouble was all in Solomon's heart. It is the heart that needs watching and keeping with all diligence. A "perfect" heart does not mean a sinless heart, but a heart wholly devoted in its aim and motive to God and His service.

Solomon had a corner in his heart for the Lord, and then other corners for the gods of all the other nations. The Saviour's words are: "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." We need to be on our guard against Solomonian religion. There is plenty of it. It abhors the preaching of the stern truths of God's word about sin and penalty, and about holiness. It sends well-nigh everybody to heaven, and regards hell as a mere fable. It calls strict Christians "puritanic" or "strait-laced." It calls great sins "escapades," and finds no use for such psalms as the fifty-first. It is not hard to see in this verse, however, which of the two kinds of religion pleases God best, and which leads to the best end.

The Lord . . . which had appeared unto him twice.—1 KINGS xi. 9.

OLD Matthew Henry says: "God keeps account of the gracious visits He makes us, whether we do or no; knows how often He has appeared to us and for us, and will remember it against us, if we turn from Him." The more we know of God, and the greater the favor He shows us, the sorer is our sin if we forsake Him and go back to sin.

When Solomon had seen the Lord in vision, not once only, but twice, he should have been forever a man consecrated to God. The eyes that had looked upon the Lord should never have lusted after earth's pleasures. The hands that had fashioned a glorious temple for God never should have built altars for heathen deities. Solomon's sins were far greater because of the favors God had granted to him.

Have we seen Christ? Has He appeared to us in prayer, or at the holy table? Let us not forget that having seen Christ should set us apart forever for His service and for holy living.

Thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee.—1 KINGS xvii. 4.

GOD is never at a loss to find a way of providing for His children. All things are His servants. The brooks of water, the birds of the air, the beasts of the field, the wings of ravens, the waves of the sea—all creatures, all things animate and inanimate —belong to Him and are ready to serve Him at His call.

Some people are troubled about miracles, asking how God can interrupt the regular order of nature to do any special favor for a child of His. If we understand how completely all things are under God's hands, it will not be hard for us to believe that miracles are possible. Perhaps none of us ever were fed by ravens as Elijah was, but in other ways, not less marvellous, God brings to us our daily bread. Railroad trains carry it across continents, or ships bear it around the globe to bring it to our doors. We are too wise in these days—too wise on scientific subjects—to get the most perfect peace from the promises of God.

MAY 20

He requested for himself that he might die.—1 KINGS xix. 4.

ELIJAH was in a state of despondency when he uttered this unworthy prayer. It was not fright that produced this condition of mind—it was discouragement. It seemed to him that all the struggle on Carmel had amounted to nothing.

It is a sad picture—this great prophet lying there under a little bush in the wilderness, begging that he might die. This is one of the unanswered prayers of the Bible, and it is well for Elijah it was not answered. If he had died then, what an inglorious ending would it have been to his life! As it was, however, he lived to do further glorious work, and instead of dying in the wilderness, he missed death altogether.

It is never right to wish ourselves dead. Life is God's gift to us, a sacred trust for which we shall have to give account. As long as God keeps us living He has something for us to do. Our prayers should be for grace to bear our burden and do our duty bravely unto the end.

The man of God sent unto the king of Israel, saying, Beware that thou pass not such a place.—2 KINGS vi. 9.

NOTHING is hidden from God. We are told that the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation. Here we have an illustration of this. The Lord knew the plans of the king of Syria to entrap the king of Israel. He made known these plans to Elisha, and he in turn told the king of Israel of the ambush, that he might save himself from the peril.

The Bible gives us many such warnings. In such and such paths, it tells us, it is not safe for us to go, for Satan walks there.

There is a fable of a wonderful ring which a prince wore, that clasped his finger softly while he went in right ways, but stung him sharply whenever he was in danger of going in some wrong path. That is what conscience does. If only we heeded the warnings of our conscience we should never get into places of danger, save when duty called us there, and then we should have protection, for when God sends us He will take care of us.

Elisha was fallen sick of his sickness whereof he died.—2 KINGS xiii. 14.

IT is interesting, while we stand beside this old man's deathbed, to think of the blessing he was to the country in which he lived. He first appears as a young farmer ploughing, when suddenly behind him comes the prophet Elijah and throws over his shoulders a sheepskin cloak. This cloak was the emblem of the prophetic office, and the young farmer was called to the ministry. From that time his life was given up to God's service, first as the attendant of Elijah, and then as the prophet of Israel. He was a man of gentle mood and kindly spirit. But a few incidents are recorded of him, but these show us the spirit of the man. The friend of the poor and the oppressed, he was also the counsellor and helper of kings.

There is no time when a man's life and work can be seen quite so truly as from amid the shadows of his death hour. We should live so that when the end of our life comes the world may speak approvingly of us.

When the man touched the bones of Elisha, he revived.—2 KINGS xiii. 21.

OF course this was a miracle. The incident illustrates the truth that a good man's influence lives after him.

There is a story of an old monk who was shipwrecked and cast upon a desert island. He had with him a package of seeds which he scattered upon the bare island. Soon afterward he died there, but twenty years later, some persons coming to the island found it covered from side to side with waving harvests and luxuriant fruit-trees, the result of the scattering of the seeds from the monk's hand twenty years ago. So it is with those who live well: wherever they go, they drop seeds which spring up into beauty.

There is a legend which says that when the Empress Helena was searching for the true cross, three crosses were found. They brought a dead body and laid it in turn upon the crosses. When it rested upon the true cross, it became alive. This is only a legend, but it illustrates the truth that the power of Christ always gives life and healing.

It was in my mind to build an house: . . . but the word of the Lord came to me, saying, . . . Thou shalt not build.—1 CHRON. xxii. 7, 8.

THERE are many people who do preparatory work. A man goes to the West and clears off a piece of ground, building a rude log hut. His son succeeds him, and in the midst of broad, rich acres erects a palatial home. The father's work was just as necessary and important, in its place, as the son's.

One set of men make the excavation for a great building, and put in the foundations. For weeks they toil away under ground, and then another set of men come, and the walls rise up and a magnificent building is erected. The foundation work is buried, but who will say it is less important than the splendid house built above?

It is the same in all Christian work. One prepares the way, another follows and speaks the word which saves. To each one God allots a part, and if we do our own work, God asks nothing more. He accepts our purposes and blesses us for good intentions, though others carry them out.

Commanded Judah to seek the Lord, . . . and to do the law and the commandment.—2 CHRON. xiv. 4.

REPENTANCE is not complete unless we get back to God and renew our allegiance to Him. One of our Lord's parables tells of the casting out of an evil spirit, the man's heart then being left empty. By and by the demon, returning after many wanderings, found his old house swept and garnished, but still empty; and, gathering up a number of other demons worse than himself, he returned into his old place. That is always the story when evil is cast out and the life is not filled with God.

There is a verse in one of Paul's epistles in which the apostle calls upon Christians to present their bodies as living sacrifices to Him. He wants our body that He may purify it and give it back to us cleansed. We must not think that it is merely for the help that we can give to God that He so earnestly desires the consecration of ourselves to Him; it is that He may take us, with all our sinfulness, and make us holy and beautiful, like Christ.

His heart was lifted up in the ways of the Lord.—2 CHRON. xvii. 6.

THERE is a bad lifting up and a good lifting up. Some people are made vain by prosperity. The temptation for us when first called to do any work, if we accomplish it with some measure of success, is to become proud. It ought to make us humble to learn that God is using us, is entrusting us with something of His to minister to others, and is blessing the work which we are doing for Him. Every favor we receive should make us more earnest in doing the will of God.

Too often, as money comes in, and prosperity increases, people get so absorbed in these new gifts of God that the Giver Himself fades out of their vision. We should never forget that every new kindness which comes to us is a new evidence of God's thought for us, and that because of it we should love Him the more and devote ourselves the more earnestly to His work. If only we thus see the hand of God in every new mercy and goodness that comes to us, our hearts will be lifted up in the ways of the Lord.

The Lord your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away his face from you, if ye return unto Him.—2 CHRON. xxx. 9.

GOD loves to forgive. The only time in the Bible God is represented as running is in the parable of the Prodigal Son, when the father ran to meet his penitent boy.

The Koran says that every man has two angels, who walk by his side all the day. One is the angel of good deeds, who records every good thing the man does, and puts it down ten times lest something may be omitted. The other is the angel of evil deeds, who keeps a record of every wrong thing the man does. At nightfall both these angels fly home to God and make their report. The angel of good deeds tells of all that has been beautiful in the man's conduct during the day, and the angel of evil deeds reports all the wrong. Then the angel of good deeds begs that the record of sins shall not be put down for seven hours. Perhaps the man will repent, confess, and be forgiven. This Mohammedan legend represents the truth about God, who is slow to anger and quick to show mercy.

Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.—PSALM xxxii. 1.

THIS beatitude does not say, "Blessed is the sinless man," but, "Blessed is the sinner forgiven." Unforgiven sin lies as a dead weight upon a life. But with forgiveness comes all the blessedness of life and glory. When we are forgiven we become at once God's children, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ to the inheritance of eternal life. God covers our sins, and they are put out of sight forever—out of our sight, out of the world's sight, out of God's sight. God says He will remember our sins against us no more. So the covering is complete and final. The reason is, that the sins are covered by an atonement made by another. My forgetting that I owe a debt does not pay the debt. But when some other one pays it for me, the debt is covered and the charge blotted out. "All we like sheep have gone astray, . . . and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." If our sins were laid on Jesus, surely they are covered forever and will never rise up against us!

MAY 29

The proverbs of Solomon.—PROV. i. 1.

SOLOMON learned a great deal by experience. He put all the resources of this world to the test to see just what they would do for a man. His proverbs are not, therefore, mere bits of theory, like many wise words we see; they were all wrought out in the crucible of actual experience.

Some of his words mark dangers: "Don't turn this way!" Some of them point to the safe path: "This is the way!" Whatever he found in life he set down here for the benefit of those who would come after.

It is wonderful, too, at how many points these proverbs touch life, and how intensely practical they are. To ponder them and to follow their instruction is to live well and grandly. It is wonderful also that while Solomon himself wandered so far from God, there is not in all his writings a single word that excuses his sins. Everywhere he points away from the wrong path and to the right.

A wise man will hear, and will increase learning.—PROV. i. 5.

THE wise man never ceases to be a learner. He never gets to a point where he feels satisfied with his attainments. Many a man who starts out with great promise in early life, by and by loses his energy and fails of his early hope, because in the elation of his first successes he stopped learning, and then growth was at an end, and when growth stops decay begins.

An old artist had for his motto: "*Nulla dies sine linea*" (No day without a line). Every day he would add one line, at least, to his knowledge and attainment. There could be no better motto for any life, young or old. Every day we should learn something we did not know before, add some new fact to our store of knowledge. Every day we should get some new lesson into our life, learn at some point to live better. This applies to secular life—there should be daily progress in the business or profession we pursue. It applies to spiritual life—no day should be without its added line of likeness to Christ.

MAY 31

There was a darkness over all the earth.—LUKE xxiii. 44.

HE died in darkness, that when we walk in the valley of the shadow of death, the light of glory may shine about us. Death for the Christian has no bitterness, because Jesus drained the curse from it. Mrs. Browning has pictured, with rare beauty, the effect of Christ's death upon two seraphim who lingered a little behind the hosts of heaven that had gathered about the cross. One of them is troubled by the thought that men will now have more reason to love God than even the angels have.

"*Oh! not with this blood on us—and this face,*
Still, haply, pale with sorrow that it bore
In our behalf, and tender evermore
With nature all our own, upon us gazing—
Nor yet with these forgiving hands upraising
Their unreproachful wounds, alone to bless!
Alas, Creator! shall we love Thee less
Than mortals shall?"

JUNE 1

It is finished.—JOHN XIX. 30.

THOUGH the life of Jesus had been so short, He was quite ready to go when the end came. He had done each day the work given to Him to do that day, and when the last hour of the last day came there was nothing that He had left undone. We ought to learn the lesson, and live as Jesus lived, so as to have every part of our work finished when the end comes. But what was it that was finished, when Jesus bowed His head on the cross? A famous picture represents Christ lifted up, and beneath Him an innumerable procession of the saints advancing out of the darkness and coming into the light of His cross. There can be no doubt that He had such a vision of redemption while He hung there, for we are told that He "endured the cross, despising the shame, because of the *joy set before Him.*" "It is finished," was therefore a shout of victory as He completed His work of suffering. He went into the grave, but not to stay there. He came again, a glorious conqueror; and because He lives, all His people shall live also.

JUNE 2

What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.—Acts xi. 9.

IT is very hard to give up old beliefs. The Jews had always been taught, as part of their religion, that they must keep themselves separate from the Gentiles. It was hard for them to believe that Peter had done right in accepting the hospitality of a Roman. It was hard for Peter himself to become willing to visit Cornelius. It required a special divine vision to convince him that the old law was changed, and that now everybody was to be considered a brother.

We need to learn to keep mind and heart ever open to receive the truth, even when it sweeps away our old beliefs.

Peter, however, tells us what we should do. No distinction should be made any more among men, but to every one the love of Christ should be offered. We can love and help some more easily than others. But when we see one who needs us, we must never ask who it is. He is our neighbor, and we are to love him.

JUNE 3

They which were scattered . . . travelled, . . . preaching the word.—Acts xi. 19.

THERE was a pile of logs burning on the edge of some woods. The wind determined to put out the fire, and, gathering itself into a tempest, violently assaulted it. The result was, the coals were carried through the woods, falling among the dry leaves and underbrush. Instead, therefore, of putting out the fire, the storm only scattered it everywhere, for every hot coal started a new burning, and soon the whole forest was ablaze.

It was not in the minds of the first believers to take the gospel to the nations outside. Persecution was an effort to put out the heavenly fire. Instead of this, however, it only drove the Christians into all parts of the world. So it happened that a thousand little churches were started.

The name of Barnabas shines brightly here. If he had been a narrow man he might have checked the work. But he was a good man, full of love and of the Holy Spirit, and the work prospered.

JUNE 4

Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made . . . for him.—Acts xii. 5.

SOME of His followers Christ wants to witness for Him by dying for Him. The ministry of James was short. It seems strange to us that he was not spared to live longer, to tell others of his Master. But he did the work which had been given him to do.

Others Christ wants to serve Him by living long for Him. Peter was delivered from Herod's hands that he might continue to preach and be a blessing to many. No prison can hold a man when Christ wants him outside. Gates count for nothing when God proposes to open them. It was prayer that opened Peter's prison. The Christians met together and besought God for Peter's release. Their prayer was heard, and, while they were still pleading, Peter knocked at the door. Sometimes the answers to our prayers surprise us. Peter's friends could not believe it was him at the door, though they had been praying all night for his deliverance.

JUNE 5

Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.—Acts xiii. 2.

THE live church is always a missionary church. It is not content to have the gospel only for itself, but wants others to have it, too. The church at Antioch was prosperous. The people showed their love for Christ by sending money to Christians in Palestine who were suffering from famine. They showed it further by sending missionaries. Barnabas and Saul were chosen for this mission. The Spirit named the missionaries, and then the church ordained them and sent them out.

We have in this chapter a sad story of a young missionary helper who belonged to the party sent out from Antioch. For a time he was faithful, while there was no danger and while they were in a civilized country. But when they passed over into a wild region, among rough people, John Mark left the missionaries and returned home.

We should never abandon any work we begin for our Master. When it begins to cost, we should begin to rejoice.

JUNE 6

The apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter.—Acts xv. 6.

RELIGIOUS contentions are often about matters of only minor importance. People agree on essential things and then quarrel about things that do not matter. It would save many strifes that do great harm if men would seek counsel in their differences and find a basis of agreement. If a peaceful course had not been followed in this ancient case, the Christian Church would have been rent in two, and no one can tell what the disastrous consequences would have been.

Christians should always be ready to yield their own preferences to prevent strife. "Blessed are the peacemakers."

There is a story of two monks who had never quarreled. They began to think their life monotonous, and one of them suggested that they quarrel. "Well, what shall we quarrel about?" "About this stone," was the answer. "You say it is yours and I'll say it is mine." "This stone belongs to me," said the first. "Very well –you may have it," was the reply.

Certain which went out from us have troubled you with words.—Acts xv. 24.

THERE are some people who are always troubling others with words, as "certain" had been doing at Antioch. There are contentious persons still, who are never so much in their element as when they are picking a quarrel. There are those who think they are fond of Bible study, but who really are fond only of quibbling over controverted passages. Those who are set to instruct such Christians should deal with them most gently and patiently. The religion of Christ never lays needless burdens on any disciples. There are certain essential things, and these should be plainly set forth. Then there are things not essential, and these should not be bound on the backs of the followers of Christ. A distinguished clergyman says that the text, "Do justly, love mercy, walk humbly with thy God," is the greatest saying of the Old Testament. It presents in the simplest words the whole of what God requires. Surely men need not require more of others than God does!

JUNE 8

So Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus.—Acts xv. 39.

ONLY the generous interest of Barnabas in him gave John Mark his second chance. He had sadly failed in his first. He started with Paul and Barnabas on their missionary tour, but returned home. He now wanted a chance to redeem himself, and Paul would not take him again. Barnabas was his friend, however, and thus Mark got a new start and became a worthy and useful man. Barnabas seems to have been right, though this cost him the friendship of Paul. The two men quarrelled and separated. But Mark was worth saving from his failure.

Paul did not mean to go into Europe, but other doors which he sought to enter were shut against him, and a divine vision called him to the new continent. It was a beautiful beginning, there on the river bank, that Sabbath, when Paul found a little company of women at their worship, and told them about Christ, and when at least one woman opened her heart to Christ and her home to the missionaries.

When her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas.—Acts xvi. 19.

WHEN the gospel touches men's pockets it tests their character. Paul did a noble work for this poor demented woman, but it unfitted her for being a source of profit to her masters. They stirred up the people against the missionaries. The prison at Philippi was the scene of strange occurrences that night. The missionaries were in the underground dungeon. Their bodies were sore from scourging. Their feet were screwed fast in wooden clamps. Yet at midnight the other prisoners heard songs in the lower prison. All their sufferings could not stop the joy in the men's hearts. The next strange thing was the conversion of the jailer. He cried out and asked what he must do to be saved. Paul told him to believe on the Lord Jesus, and he should be saved. How do we know he was saved? We know it by the change in the man. He was brutal and cruel before. Now we see him become gentle as a woman.

JUNE 10

Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them.—Acts xvii. 2.

PAUL was a man of habits. "His custom was" always to attend church. It is a fine thing to have such a "custom." Too many people grow careless about going to church. Those who become Christ's friends should come out and join Christ's company. Some people believe on Christ, but stay mixed up in the old company, and nobody knows that they are Christians. That is not what Christ wants us to do.

Sometimes the true thing in time of persecution is to go away. The missionaries left Thessalonica by night. There was no reason why they should stay longer. So they went on to Berea. We may never flee from our duty, but it may sometimes be our duty to flee.

The Bereans showed their nobility of character by receiving the words of Paul readily and making inquiry to see if they were according to the Scriptures. It is the mark of a narrow mind to refuse to examine what is said before rejecting it.

His spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.—Acts xvii. 16.

A BELIEVER in God cannot look upon the world's treatment of holy things without sore pain.

Athens was a city of idols. There were more gods there than men—it was said. It was not easy to confess Christ in Athens, amid such exhibitions of idolatry as were seen everywhere. Yet that was just the place the true God should be proclaimed, and Paul was the only witness God had there.

It is not enough for us to speak for God only where His name is honored, where all the people are, in a way, His friends. If we do this and then shrink from mentioning His name where all are hostile, we have failed in loyalty.

Paul spoke words at Athens which the people had never heard before. He told of the one God in a place where hundreds of gods were worshipped. He declared God as spiritual and unseen, where all the people worshipped statues they could see.

Aquila, . . . lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla.—Acts xviii. 2.

THERE is a Hand that directs our movements and shapes our lives. An old English poet wrote of what we call chance:

"*It chanced—eternal God that chance did guide.*"

Aquila and Priscilla were brought to Corinth by a hardship. But if they had not been at Corinth they would not have met Paul. They needed Paul and Paul needed them, so it was a blessed chance that brought them together. He was working at Corinth, lonely and a bit discouraged. Then two friends joined him, and at once we read that he preached with new earnestness. A good friend is a mighty impulse in any man's life. Christ is always an encourager. Paul was again disheartened. Then the Lord said to him, "Be not afraid, but speak, . . . for I am with thee." Paul took fresh courage and preached with new power.

JUNE 13

They took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.—Acts xviii. 26.

WE should know the whole gospel if we would do Christian work well. Apollos was a Christian, and was earnest and eloquent, but he had gone in his knowledge of Christ only as far as the Baptist's teaching. Priscilla and Aquila heard him preach, and saw the defect. They saw that he did not know of Christ's death and resurrection. When they had taught him the whole gospel, he became a powerful preacher.

About the best service we can do to most people we meet is to encourage them. More than half the men and women we meet any day need encouragement. One of the worst sins we can commit against others is to be a discourager. Perhaps the trouble with a good many Christians is the same that ailed the dozen men whom Paul found at Ephesus. They had not even heard that the Spirit was given. We can have power in witnessing for Christ only when we are filled with the Spirit.

JUNE 14

There arose no small stir about that way.—Acts xix. 23.

WHEREVER the gospel goes it wakes up opposition. Especially when it touches men's business adversely does it excite their worst passions. Here it was the silversmiths' business that was imperilled. The harangue of Demetrius shows that Paul's preaching was of the right kind. Some preaching does not disturb sin nor alarm sinners. But Paul's stirred up those who heard it. He denounced idols—said they were no gods. This frightened the silversmiths, for their chief business was in making shrines of Diana.

A good test of a revival is when it touches the sins of a community, and draws people from them.

About the sanest man in Ephesus that day was the town clerk. He was a loyal believer in Diana, but he had sense enough to know that it would be foolish to do any harm to the missionaries. The preachers had said nothing against their goddess, they had only preached their own religion, and to harm them would only bring trouble upon those who did it.

Paul called unto him the disciples, and embraced them, and departed.—Acts xx. 1.

DRIVEN from one place, Paul only went to preach in another. No persecution ever quenched his zeal. A Hindu said Christians were like certain fruit-trees—clubbing only brought down the fruit. This was true of Paul. It ought to be true of every Christian. The more people oppose us and seek to injure us, the more love should be revealed in our lives. Paul's preaching might not have pleased some present-day congregations that insist on having abbreviated sermons. On one occasion at least Paul kept his congregation a good deal over the thirty-minute standard. It was well past midnight, and he would not have stopped then if something had not happened. We can scarcely blame Eutychus for getting sleepy, and it must have made a great commotion when he fell. But even this did no more than interrupt the preaching—it did not stop it, for Paul continued till daybreak, and then they had the Lord's Supper before he left them.

I take you to record this day that I am pure from the blood of all men.—Acts xx. 26.

IT is a happy thing for a minister, or anybody, to be able to look back on years of life and work, and to find nothing to regret—nothing done che were better not done. Yet that is the way we should all live. Paul's review of his life shows a fine model of pastoral faithfulness. He had been always with his people—not running away on all manner of excursions. He had loved his people—that is the secret of ministerial success. A man who does not love people cannot be a good pastor.

It is a great thing for any one to be able to say, "I am pure from the blood of all men." This implies that we have done all we could do to show Christ to them.

Paul's farewell shows how deep an interest he had in the people he was leaving. It shows his faith, too, for he commits them all to God, knowing that they would not be forgotten or overlooked when the pastor was gone.

Finding disciples, we tarried there seven days.—Acts xxi. 4.

We get a lesson on wayside ministry. Some people travel a good deal, stopping at certain places. If they are eager to be helpful to others, they can find opportunities, to do much good in these pauses. When the ship called at Tyre, Paul improved the opportunity to look up the Christians that were there. Again at Ptolemais he saluted the brethren. It never will be known how much good he did to the Christians at these places.

Paul's friends, when they learned what awaited him, begged him not to go on. He refused to listen to their pleadings, but no doubt their appeals made it harder for him to go forward to do God's will.

Peter would have held Jesus from going on to death, but Jesus told him he was acting the part of Satan, tempting Him. When our friends have a hard duty we should encourage them to loyalty, not to faintheartedness. The true follower of Christ should be ready to endure any cost or sacrifice for the name of Christ.

When we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly.—Acts xxi. 17.

WHEREVER Christians meet they recognize in each other brothers. Though strangers before, they greet one another as friends. The Jews welcomed Paul and rejoiced to hear of the work among the Gentiles. But they knew there were many Jewish Christians who could not quite trust Paul. They thought he was disloyal to his nation. But what they had heard about him was not true. He had never taught the Jewish Christians to forsake Moses. Yet that is the way bigotry often does—it misstates the words of an opponent.

Sometimes, to remove false impressions, we have to do things it ought not to be necessary for us to do. Paul accepted the advice of the leaders that he should make an exhibition of his loyalty to Jewish rites to prove to suspicious people that he was really in sympathy with his own people.

It is right for us to seek to free ourselves from false charges when thereby we are promoting the good of the Church.

I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day. —Acts xxiii. 1.

CONSCIENCE may lead us to do wrong. Paul acted conscientiously even when he was persecuting Christians. Conscience needs divine instruction.

No doubt Paul had a right as a Christian to protest against the way the high priest smote him in the face. Still, we cannot help feeling that Christ's bearing on His trial was nobler, and sets us a better example than Paul's. He, when reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not, but committed all to Him who judgeth righteously. Paul's apologizing is an example we may follow safely if ever we are betrayed into hot-tempered speech or act. It is always noble in a man to say, "I did wrong," or "I was mistaken," when he has given way to any unchristian feeling. Some people are too proud ever to apologize.

Again we see Christ here as an encourager. Paul had had a depressing day. Then Jesus came to him with cheer, assuring him that he should see Rome—a dream of many years.

JUNE 20

When Paul's sister's son heard of their lying in wait, he went . . . and told Paul.—Acts xxiii. 16.

NOTHING is more sure than that God keeps guard on the lives of those who are carrying out His plans. No bullet can strike down on the battlefield to-day the man for whom the Lord has work to-morrow. Paul had been assured that he must witness for Christ at Rome. The next day there was a conspiracy to kill him. But his enemies could not touch him. He was under divine protection. Strange are the providences by which God carries out His purposes. We do not know anything about Paul's sister's son —we have only one glimpse of him. Somehow this young man heard of the conspiracy. He was brave enough to run risks in getting word to Paul.

The human links are important in working out God's deliverance. We must always be ready to do our duty in helping those who are in trouble. Our part may be the essential one, and our neglect may result in the failure of the whole scheme.

I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation.—Acts xxiv. 10.

COURTESY is always a mark of noble character. We see it in Paul as he stands before Felix. He compliments the governor—not in a fulsome way, but in fitting words. We should study the art of pleasing others. Some people are brusque almost to rudeness. Manners are far more important in life than most people imagine.

A great many things that are said against others start only in neighborhood gossip, or from a mere supposition. That is the way this accusation against Paul started. Somebody saw him in the temple. Before this time, a Gentile, Trophimus, had been seen with Paul on the street. Then it was said that Paul had this Gentile with him in the temple.

We need to be exceedingly careful never to say anything of another which is not absolutely true. Inference, or supposition, is not basis enough to start a charge upon.

The only safe way is always to live so carefully, so truthfully, so purely, that nothing any one may say of us falsely may hurt us.

As he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled.—Acts xxiv. 25.

A POET represents the "woman who was a sinner" coming along the street when Jesus was in Simon's house. His eye saw her and her old evil self withered to nothingness. So it was with Felix when Paul's words concerning righteousness, self-control, and judgment fell upon him. "Felix was terrified." He could not stand those withering eyes and those searching words. The course of Felix in sending away the preacher and postponing the matter is the course which men continually take. It is a well-trodden pathway, and there always are many feet treading it.

"*To-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow*
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death."

When I found that he had . . . appealed unto Augustus, I have determined to send him.—ACTS XXV. 25.

PAUL had been assured that he would witness for Christ at Rome. But the way to Rome was a long one for him. He was kept in prison, and prevented from reaching his destination promptly. But we may be sure that no time was really lost.

God's plans often move slowly, and if we try to hurry them we only do harm. The Roman courts were the shelter divinely provided for Paul in those days. His appeal to Cæsar saved him. If he had been in the hands of the Jews, he would have been killed. But Roman justice was a wall about him which shielded him. Paul's mission was to go to Rome as a missionary, and Rome carried him there. God's hand moves in all the world's events. Paul's affairs filled a large place in men's thoughts in those days. The Jews kept clamoring at the door of Festus for his death. But Festus found that they had no charge against him worthy of attention. So Paul's appeal to Cæsar protected him from his enemies.

JUNE 24

I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you.—ROM. i. 8.

PAUL was a model pastor. To begin with, he was unalterably devoted to Christ. Then he loved people with a love that was wondrously like the love of Christ. Here he thanks God for the friends to whom he is writing, especially for their faith. Then he appeals to God to witness to the sincerity of his interest in them, which led him unceasingly to make mention of them in his prayers.

The prayer which at that time was in his heart was that he might be prospered in his desire to get to them at Rome. He longed to see them. The reason he thus so wished to see them shows a most lofty spiritual motive. His desire was purely unselfish—"that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift." Here we have a high ideal for all friendship. We should always want to do our friends good. Every time we meet them we should wish to do something for them—to give them some cheer, some comfort, to put a little new courage into their hearts.

The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness.—ROM. i. 18.

IT is well that we sometimes have a glimpse of some of the possibilities of sin, that we may know what a terrible thing it is. Such a glimpse Paul gives us in our reading for to-day. There would not seem to be much in this fearful portrayal to give us comfort or cheer. Yet the black picture has its suggestion of praise—this is the abyss from which we have been saved by the grace of God.

Some one illustrates the greatness of salvation by two visions. First, he had a vision of the awful fruits of sin. "That," said his guide, "is what in the ages of eternity you would have been, if you had gone on in sin, unredeemed." Then he was shown the glories of the redeemed. He saw hosts of angels dwelling in ineffable glory, and beyond and above these, in the far distance, he beheld beings transcendently radiant and glorious. "That," said the guide, "is yourself ages hence. Behold the bliss and glory into which your Saviour will bring you."

Wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself.—Rom. ii. 1.

WE are not judged according to our advantages, but by what we make of these advantages. Indeed the more light we have the greater is our responsibility and the more will be required of us. If we sit apart, in the comfort of our superior privileges, and judge those who have not our privileges and live unworthily, we must beware, for in condemning others we condemn ourselves. It is a good thing to be born in a Christian land and to be brought up in a Christian home, but if we do not live according to our advantages, it would have been better for us if we had been born in a heathen land. That was what Jesus said about the people in Capernaum and the other cities where He had lived and preached and wrought, doing His works of love and grace. He said it would be more tolerable for Sodom than for those cities, because having the privileges, they had rejected them. We need to lay the lesson to heart, for we have Christ ever on our streets.

There is none righteous, no, not one.—Rom. iii. 10.

A PREACHER writes that he was recently waited on by an officer of the church, of which he is a pastor, telling him that in these days of intelligence and liberal thinking, it is better that a man shall not preach about sin. This third chapter of Romans will be ruled out in that church and will not be considered suitable for reading in the pulpit.

Nevertheless, the chapter is in the Bible, and it will not be obsolete for some time. If there had been no sin there would have been no need for the redemption of Christ. The background of the cross is the terrible fact of sin. "All have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God." The word "sin" means missing the mark. The glory of God is yonder, on the shining mountain-top, and men are standing helpless at the foot of the mountain. They never can climb the steep cliffs. They fall short of the glory of God. If there were no other way, not one ever could reach glory. Sin leaves all men far off from hope.

Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.—ROM. iv. 3.

THERE is a way of reaching the mountain-top. The best that the holiest man can do leaves him far short of the glory of God. But divine mercy comes down and bridges over the chasm. Jesus said, "I am the way: . . . no one cometh unto the Father, but by Me." There is a story of a boy and his little brother crossing a lake on the ice. They came to a crack, and the little fellow could not get across. Then his brother laid himself down over the crack, making a bridge of his body, and the little fellow crept over on him. That is what Jesus did. Men could not cross the great chasm between sin and glory, and He laid His own body across it, and on this "way" whosoever will may pass over and reach the Father and blessedness.

The word "justified" means that those who accept the redemption of Christ become as though they had not sinned, so completely are their sins put away. All we have to do is to accept of Christ.

By the righteousness of One the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.—ROM. v. 18.

ALL grace and good come to us through Jesus Christ. Through one man sin entered into the world. When Christ came He gained the victory of life. So now, through Him, all that is holy, true, and good comes to all who accept Him. There is no other one through whom we can get blessing. Without Christ even earth's sweetest joys have no power to give us enduring happiness. But when we have Christ, everything is enriched. The world grows more beautiful. The common blessings of the common days come from His hand and have new sweetness in them. Our daily bread is more sacred by being His gift to us. Every flower we see by the wayside suggests to us some thought of Him. But the best blessings that come through Christ are the things of grace, heavenly good things. These are eternal, and we should never lose them. We need only to make sure that we accept Christ and His redemption, and then all things shall be ours in Him.

Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin.—ROM. vi. 11.

IT is a wonderful suggestion, as a scheme of life, that we shall reckon ourselves to be dead unto sin. A dead man cannot sin. A story is told of an old shoemaker who had been a wicked man. He had a terrible temper, and in his fits of anger would throw his hammer, or a last, or anything within his reach, at the person who had excited his feeling. But after his conversion he never got angry any more. "I am dead," he would say. "A dead man cannot get into bad temper. A dead man cannot throw a hammer."

If we would train ourselves to be dead to all that is wrong, we should soon get away from many very unlovely things. Then we should also reckon ourselves to be alive unto God. It is not enough to suppress evil—we must also nourish whatever is good. It is not enough not to be bad-tempered; we must become sweet in our spirit, and be gentle, forgiving, and kind. All the best possibilities in us should be called out by the love of Christ in us.

Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.—ROM. vi. 18.

WE must serve some one. If we are not under one master we must be under another. Becoming a Christian is changing masters; it is coming out from under the yoke of sin and accepting the sway of Christ. We have it here: "Being made free from sin, ye became servants of righteousness." Paul was himself an illustration of this. He was on his way to Damascus, breathing slaughter against the Christians. Like a flash appeared before him a glorious Being who could not be less than divine. "Who art Thou?" "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest." Instantly Saul saw what a terrible mistake he had been making, and at once he was at the feet of Him whom he had been persecuting. He had a new Master, and his whole life was surrendered.

Too many people, when they accept Christ, do not bring their whole life with them. Paul did, and that is what every one who follows Christ should do. We should become as earnest as Christians as we were before in our service of the world.

It is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.—ROM. vii. 17.

PAUL shows us a vision of his inner life, and we see a fierce struggle going on. The two men in him were utterly different in their character and aim. "Not what I would, that do I practise; but what I hate, that I do.' His better self approved the right, but the other self, which seemed the stronger, did the wrong. "So now it is no more I that do it, but sin which dwelleth in me." The good that was struggling in him was the new life, Christ in him, and the other self was sin that was fighting hard not to be driven out. For the time the evil seemed the stronger. "To will is present with me, but to do that which is good is not. For the good which I would I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I practise." We understand this if we are really striving to live a holy life.

A prayer of Fenelon's runs, "Lord, take me, for I cannot give myself to Thee; and when Thou hast me, keep me, for I cannot keep myself; and save me in spite of myself."

Ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.—ROM. viii. 15.

WHEN we put ourselves under the yoke of Christ, He is able to free us from the old evil nature. "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." What we should do when we find some sin struggling in us for the mastery is to refer the matter to Christ. He is stronger than the strongest evil. He met all powers and overcame them all. He is able to overcome also for us. He is a proved Saviour. The Spirit of God dwells in us. "If any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His." But if Christ lives in us we need never give way to any evil influence. We have here a plain rule which will make it easy for us to know whether we are living right or not: "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God." This again starts us in a chain of wonderful privileges. "We are children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ."

JULY 4

We know that all things work together for good to them that love God.—ROM. viii. 28.

PEOPLE often ask how there can be good in everything. Here is the answer. "We know that to them that love God, all things work together for good." If only we love God, all things will work together so as to bring good to us. It may not seem that this or that particular experience can yield good. But God is able to combine this seemingly harmful thing with other things, and from the combination bring good. The selling of Joseph by his brothers was a black crime, and an observer would have said the evil never could be turned to good. Yet we know the sequel. "The Lord meant it for good."

A lady showed Mr. Ruskin a handkerchief on which some careless person had dropped a drop of ink. Mr. Ruskin took the handkerchief away and returned it in a few days with an India ink engraving on it, using the ugly blot as the basis of the design. So God will take the blots in our lives and change them into beauty, if only we love Him and are faithful.

JULY 5

I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy.—ROM. ix. 15.

IT is a great honor to be chosen by God for some noble position or some great service. Abraham was chosen from among all the men of his age to be the beginner of a family that would serve the Lord and become the inheritors of His grace. Jacob was chosen to be the father of the people of God to whom the divine revelations might be entrusted. Jesus chose twelve men to be His apostles, that they might be trained and thus be prepared to become His witnesses after He was gone. Christ is always choosing men and women for special duties and special responsibilities. Indeed He is always choosing us for something good or something beautiful; sometimes for joy, sometimes for sorrow. "Ye did not choose Me," He says to us, "but I chose you, and appointed you, that ye should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should abide." Whatever it may be for which we are chosen, so far as condition and experience may go, we know that the Master's final desire is that we may bear fruit in love and service.

JULY 6

The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart. —Rom. x. 8.

MANY people never find what they seek, because they do not seek for it where it is. They travel far to look for something which is waiting at their very feet. They want to find Christ in their needs and heart-hungers, and they strain their eyes looking for Him in the heavens, while all the time He is close to them, closer than the air. "Say not in thy heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down). . . . The word is nigh thee." Always Christ is nigh, and we never need to look for Him far off.

A monk was praying for a vision of Christ. A little child came to his door and cried for help, but the monk had no time for the child—he was watching for the vision, which did not appear. At the close of the day he learned that Christ came in the little child, called, sobbed, was refused, and went away.

We should look close to ourselves always for the thing we seek. We need only to listen any moment to hear the voice we want to hear.

Hath God cast away His people? God forbid.—Rom. xi. 1.

GOD never casts off any one. His love never fails. Sometimes people speak as if He had cast off the Jewish people, but He did not—He never did. The trouble was that they cast God off. Yet even at the darkest hour there was a remnant of them who were faithful and received the blessing. God never fails in His promises. His word is "The mountains may depart, and the hills be removed; but My loving kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall My covenant of peace be removed, saith Jehovah that hath mercy on thee." This covenant of peace never has been broken with any one who trusted in God. But there are two parties to every covenant. God's promises are conditioned on our obedience. If we fail in our part, it is we who break the covenant. Then when the blessings promised do not come, we cannot say God has forgotten us. The truth is, we have forsaken God, and the blessings of His love have been withdrawn because we have rejected them.

Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God.—ROM. xii. 1.

DOCTRINES are the roots from which duties grow. After eleven chapters of severe logic, the strongest kind of strong meat, we have now five chapters of the most practical sort of teaching. Roots are necessary to beautiful plants, and doctrines are necessary to duties. Moralities without doctrines at the back of them are rootless plants. The two phrases, "a living sacrifice," and "be ye transformed," give us the key of all the beautiful lessons in this chapter. We are to give ourselves to Christ as a sacrifice laid upon the altar, and are to grow into all divine loveliness of disposition and character. In becoming Christians we become members of the body of Christ. This implies that it is the life of Christ that is in us, and that we must be like Him, since we are animated by His life. We can realize this beauty of life only by surrendering ourselves wholly to Christ, thus becoming in fact members of Him. Then shall we be in reality transformed into the likeness of Christ.

Owe no man anything, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.—Rom. xiii. 8.

IT may be worth our while to linger to-day on one duty suggested in our reading—to keep out of debt. "Owe no man anything." There is much need that this lesson should be enforced. There are many Christian people whose consciences need toning up on this subject. They think nothing of borrowing money. Those who are reputed to be kind-hearted have a great many requests to lend.

It is not only in time of pressing need that people want to borrow, but ofttimes in order to provide luxuries. Then the next easy step is to become careless in repaying. Some do return their loans on the day, but many never repay at all. It is a fatal habit to fall into—this of borrowing and not paying. It is ruinous to character, for when one has become able to do it without worrying—letting the other person do the worrying—one has run down to a low moral state. Then the penalty on the man who does not pay his debts is inexorably exacted by society.

JULY 10

Who art thou that judgest another man's servant?—Rom. xiv. 4.

THE law of love requires us continually to give up our rights and liberties for the sake of other people. We are not to hold others to our way of thinking. We are never to despise any one's conscientious scruples, but are always to honor them. "Who art thou that judgest the servant of another? To his lord he standeth or falleth." There are some people who thoughtlessly make it very hard for those who are troubled in conscience about doing certain things or indulging in certain pleasures. Every one must follow his own conscience, and it is very wrong for us to worry any one concerning his conscientious opinions. Our chief thought should be not to put a stumbling-block in any one's way. So we must be ready to give up anything, however right it may seem to us, that might lead another, a weaker person, to stumble into sin. The Christian who is not ready to give up any habit of his for the sake of others, has not yet learned the meaning of the great law of love, "Love seeketh not its own."

Let us therefore follow after the things . . . wherewith one may edify another.—ROM. xiv. 19.

PAUL has a great deal to say in his epistles about edifying. We are to follow after things whereby we may edify one another. "Edify" is an architectural word. To edify is to build up. We are builders. Human lives everywhere are unfinished buildings, and every one who passes by lays a block on the wall or adds an ornament to the structure. A hundred people touch you each day, in business contracts, in social fellowships, in friendships, in letters, in transient meetings, and every one of them builds something on the wall of your life, either something that will add to the adornment of your character or something that will mar and disfigure it. Every one who comes into our presence even for a moment, who speaks a word to us, even every one who reaches us most remotely with his influence, leaves some line of beauty or some mark of marring on our character. We are exhorted to be careful that in all we do to others we really edify them.

I beseech you, . . . that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me.—Rom. xv. 30.

HAPPY is he who has friends who pray for him. Paul earnestly beseeches his friends to pray for him. He felt constant need of remembrance in prayer. There is nothing our friends could do for us that would mean half so much to us as to speak our names to God. A little boy, after family worship, conducted by a guest, in which the child's name had been mentioned, said to his mother, "I am so glad Dr. Lyman told God my name. He'll know me now when He sees me." There is great comfort in knowing that others pray for us.

Then there is no way in which we can help others so wisely as by praying for them. We do not know what our friends need. Our way of trying to help them may do them more harm than good. We may relieve them of burdens or cares that God wanted them to keep and carry for a while, for their own good. If, however, we ask God to help them by making them strong, He will do for them only that which is best.

Salute the beloved Persis, which labored much in the Lord. —ROM. xvi. 12.

THIS is one of the chapters a good many Bible readers think they can skip with impunity. It is little but a list of names of people we do not know anything about. Really, however, there are no chapters we can afford to miss. In this sixteenth chapter of Romans there is a good deal more than a list of names. Each mention of a person has a condensed biography attached to it.

It is wonderful how much we will know about these Roman Christians when we meet them in heaven, if only we make a study of all that we are told about them here. Take one name as illustration. "Salute Persis the beloved, who labored much in the Lord." She was "beloved," a woman of such sweet life that, like John, she was called "the beloved." She had "labored"—past tense; now she was laid aside, perhaps a shut-in. She had "labored much"—constantly, not sparing herself. It was "in the Lord" that she had labored—that she had wrought so faithfully.

JULY 14

There is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another.—1 Cor. vi. 7.

CHRISTIANS ought to live together in love. They should never quarrel among themselves. They are brethren, and brother should not have strife with brother. If they have differences, they should settle them among themselves, and not go to law before unbelievers. Paul said it was a defect in the Corinthian Christians, that they had law-suits one with another. He intimates that they should rather take wrong, and even be defrauded, than go to law for redress.

Jesus also taught that His followers should not resist him that was evil. When one smites them on one cheek, they should turn to him the other also. Retaliation is certainly forbidden, and so is resentment. Then we need not fear that we will go too far "in letting" people wrong us rather than go to law to get our rights. We must be very sure, however, that we do not do wrong to others. Some people are more watchful over the way others treat them than of their own treatment of others.

As the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk.—1 Cor. vii. 17.

THE religion of Christ touches every phase of life. No question of duty can ever arise, but the gospel has a bearing upon it. It teaches great principles which apply to all relations of life. There is a Christian way of meeting every experience. Paul shows in this chapter how a Christian should act in certain matters with which some might say religion has nothing to do. We may learn that there is no path on which Christ does not walk with us.

The Rev. Dr. W. J. Dawson preached a sermon on "the unavoidable Christ." We never can get away from Him. There is no part of the world where we would be beyond His authority. There is no experience of life in which we do not need to ask Him what He would have us do. There are no possible relationships in which the teaching of Christ has no word of duty for us. There are no tasks in which we do not need to have His help. There are no lines of duty in which we do not need the light of His Spirit.

JULY 16

If meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth.—1 Cor. viii. 13.

IT is not enough to know that a certain course is not wrong, that we have a right to do certain things. If there were no other people in the world but ourselves, none to be considered in deciding what we may do or may not do, it would be easy to settle on our duty. But there are other people everywhere, and we have got to think of them in deciding what we have a right to do. A man has a right to have a big, bawling talking-machine in his house, and to have it going every night till midnight. It is nobody's matter but his own. But suppose there is a sick man living next door, and that the noise of the machine disturbs him at night, what is the duty of the man with the talking-machine? Love comes in then, and tells him he must give up his "right" and sacrifice his pleasure for the sake of another.

Love is a most exacting master. It makes us give up our rights and our pride and our ease—nothing can stand before it.

It were better for me to die, than that any man should make my glorying void.—1 Cor. ix. 15.

DR. GEORGE MACDONALD says somewhere that the grandest thing about our rights is that being our own we can give them up if we wish. Paul asserts that he had certain undisputed rights as an apostle, a minister of Christ. He quotes Old Testament law to prove it. It was forbidden to muzzle the ox when he was treading out the corn. It was not merely the ox that was in God's mind when He gave this law, but His own servants. They had a right to support from those for whom they labored. Yet Paul had renounced his rights in this regard. He preached the gospel without charge.

A great many pastors and Christian workers do the same in whole or in part. All who love Christ should be ready to make every needful sacrifice in doing His work, in carrying His gospel to others. The Church seems to be waking up now to the greatness of its responsibility for the salvation of the world. We should shrink from no toil or cost in winning souls.

JULY 18

So run, that ye may obtain.—1 Cor. ix. 24.

CHRISTIAN life is not meant to be easy. We must pay the price for any success we may achieve. The schoolboy, if he would win honors, must work hard for them. In the ancient games those who ran in the race bent every energy to reach the goal. Those who were to take part in athletic contests of any kind prepared for the struggle by the most rigorous self-discipline, so that their bodies might be strong for whatever they would do.

Paul, however, is not giving advice, nor laying down rules for athletes, but uses these contests to illustrate what the Christian must do. He will meet temptations at every point. But temptations are not meant to be danger-points in life—they are meant to be opportunities for growing strong. We must make up our mind to the fact that the harder our struggles are, the greater honor and power are set before us to be won. And there will come to us no temptation but such as we can bear, and God will help us always to be victorious.

Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.—1 Cor. x. 31.

NOTHING in life is left out—"whatsoever ye do." It extends even to eating and drinking. We are to do all things to the glory of God. This means that we must do everything in a way that will please Him. To eat to the glory of God is to recognize Him as the Giver of our daily bread, to seek His blessing on it, to eat according to the divine laws, eating to be ready for the best service, and then to use all our strength in doing the work which God gives us to do. One who eats self-indulgently or gluttonously, or who eats food that is injurious to his health, or who does not use the strength he derives from his food in living obediently, is not glorifying God.

In all our life, in everything we do, we are to think of what will honor God. We are to seek first His kingdom and righteousness, which includes the law of love—the things that will bless those about us. Selfishness never glorifies God, but He is always pleased with the love that seeketh not its own.

JULY 20

This do in remembrance of Me.—1 Cor. xi. 24.

THE Lord's Supper is the most sacred of the ordinances of Christian worship. It is a service of memorial—"This do in remembrance of Me." Jesus showed His humanness in His desire to be remembered. It is one proof of immortality that we cannot bear to think of being forgotten.

Jesus wants us to remember Him, however, not merely at His table, now and then, but all the while. If we keep Him thus ever in memory it will bless our lives in many ways. It will transform us into His likeness; thinking much of others makes us like them. It will keep us from doing wrong or sinful things. Even the picture of a good man makes us ashamed to do things he would disapprove. Remembering Christ keeps our hearts warm with love for Him. We are kept in mind of the sweetness of His love and of all that He has done for us, and we are constrained to love Him. Remembering Christ will make us happy, for we shall never forget that He is our Friend and is with us all the days.

There are diversities of gifts, but the same spirit.—1 Cor. xii. 4.

PEOPLE differ greatly in their gifts and capacities. It is wisely ordered that they do. If all had the same gifts, one kind of work would be overdone and other kinds would not be done at all. But as there are countless things needing to be done, so there is the greatest variety in the abilities of people, and thus there is a hand for every task.

The capacity for usefulness that we have is not accidental. "To each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit to profit withal." We should never forget that our ability is God's gift to us. This ought to save us from envying others who have abilities that seem more brilliant than ours. God gave them their capacities and God gave us ours. He had a reason—He wanted us to do a certain kind of work, to fill a certain place, and He had another place and work for them. All we need to do is to make the most of the ability God has given to us, and to do the best work we can do.

JULY 22

The greatest of these is charity. -1 Cor. xiii. 13.

LOVE is the greatest of all the Spirit's gifts. The power to love is the best of all the powers God has bestowed upon us. The lesson of love is taught us in this chapter in words we should memorize and never forget. "Love suffereth long, and is kind." Love is very patient with those who may not be gentle or thoughtful. Nothing makes it bitter or resentful. It is kind, not to the good only, but also to the evil. "Love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly." It is humble and lowly, not proud. It is not envious of those who seem to be more highly favored. It is sweet-tempered, does not fly into a passion, never acts rudely. "Love seeketh not its own, is not provoked, taketh not account of evil." It forgets self altogether, and seeks only the good of others. It sees the good in others, and not the faults and defects. It does not rejoice in the failure or misfortune of others, but in their success. It beareth all things, endureth all things – never faileth.

JULY 23

Now is Christ risen from the dead.—1 Cor. xv. 20.

THE resurrection of Christ is the keystone of the arch of gospel truth. Paul makes it very plain that if the resurrection did not take place, there is no salvation. "If Christ hath not been raised, then is our preaching vain, . . . your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ have perished." All the hopes of Christian faith waited those three days at the sealed grave of Jesus. "But now hath Christ been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of them that are asleep." Then because He hath been raised, your faith is not vain, and all your hopes are sure and eternal; you are not in your sins, the redemption was accepted; then those who have fallen asleep in Christ have not perished, but are alive forevermore.

Christ rose as the firstfruits of the great harvest, and all who sleep in Him shall come too at the last day. The firstfruit was a pledge that it would be gathered in and a sample of what the final harvest would be.

How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?—1 Cor. xv. 35.

THERE is great mystery about the future life. What kind of bodies will our dead have when they come again? We do not know. All that people tell us in trying to answer the question is only a guess, for no one has been through the gate and come back again to tell us of the experience—no one but Jesus Himself.

Paul's answer about the seed means that the body which will come again will be the same, yet not the same. The very seed sown does not come up, but something more lovely, a plant with life and foliage, blossoms and fruit. This tells us that the body of the resurrection will be far more beautiful than the body we lay in the grave. In another place Paul tells us that the body of our humiliation shall be fashioned anew, that it may be conformed to the body of Christ's glory. That is enough to know. We may safely leave all this in the hands of God, to whom belong all secret things, assured that no mind can conceive the blessing God has prepared for us.

JULY 25

Now concerning the collection.—1 Cor. xvi. 1.

IT is remarkable that the next sentence, after the conclusion of the wonderful chapter about the resurrection of Christ and His people, begins—"Now concerning the collection." It seems at first like a startling descent from the sublime truths of the resurrection and immortality to "the collection." But at the back of even the smallest duty lie all the glorious truths of Christianity.

Then we should not think of "the collection" in a church service as a minor or unimportant part of the worship. The collection of which St. Paul spoke here was for the saints who were suffering in famine, and he called upon their brothers to share their plenty with them. That was a sacred and holy duty. Always the collection is important—it is an offering to God. The giving is part of the worship, and not a secular interruption of the service. We should give our money to God just as we give our praise, our love. The collection is holy, and should be taken reverently. Jesus sits over against the treasury, and sees how men give.

JULY 26

Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort.—2 COR. i. 4.

NO message of the Bible is more universally needed in this world than the message of comfort. Many we meet every day are in sorrow. They may wear no weeds of mourning, but not all sorrow hangs out its token.

Our lesson to-day is one of comfort. First, we are reminded of God's comfort — "who comforteth us in all our affliction." He is called the "God of all comfort." Then we are told that one reason He comforts us is "that we may be able to comfort them that are in any affliction, through the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God." Part of our work in this world, therefore, is to be comforters of others. The comfort we get from God we are to pass on. One reason we are called or permitted to suffer is that we may become comforters. This is one of the blessings of sorrow: we are prepared in it for being helpers of others. We should be willing to suffer, that we may receive God's comfort, and then go out to comfort others.

JULY 27

That ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you.—2 Cor. ii. 4.

IT is sometimes the duty of love to cause pain to those who are dear. Paul made his friends sorry, but it was that he might make them glad afterwards. If we see a friend doing that which is wrong, and say not a word to seek to win him back, we have failed in our faithfulness. Our silence encourages him in his evil course. Yet it is not easy to tell others of their mistakes and sins. It requires great love and wisdom to do it in such a way that it will not do harm rather than good. Paul tells us how he did this delicate duty. "Out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears." He reveals also his motive. "Not that ye should be made sorry, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you." We are never ready to tell another of his sin unless we love him. One minister asked another one Monday what he preached on the day before. "The wrath of God," was the answer. "Did you do it tenderly?" his friend asked.

Ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us.—2 Cor. iii. 3.

IT is a great thing to have the pen of a ready writer and to have it consecrated to Christ. There are few ways in which one may do more good in the world than by writing letters to those whom one would help. Paul was a great letter-writer. When he could not visit the churches, he would write to them, giving them advice, comforting, cheering, and instructing them.

Paul speaks here of another kind of letters that he wrote—letters written on people's lives. We may write letters of this kind too. Every time we put a new thought into any other heart, we have written a letter which will be read wherever the person goes. A new society has been started called "The League of the Golden Pen." Its motto is, "I write a letter at least once a month, in the spirit of Christ, to stranger, friend, or kin, to give cheer, courage, or counsel." The thought is a beautiful one, and those who read these words could do nothing better than begin to follow this rule.

We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed.—2 Cor. iv. 8.

WE who are Christians should strive always to live a victorious life. Of course we will have our burdens, our struggles, our trials, our sufferings, but we should never be defeated or crushed by them. Our Scripture to-day sets the lesson for us. "We are pressed on every side, yet not straitened; perplexed, yet not unto despair; . . . smitten down, yet not destroyed." Our Master overcame the world. He was never once defeated. He wants us to live the same way. Of course we cannot do it ourselves, unhelped, but we may get help from Him, and be "more than conquerors through Him that loved us." Even if our physical life is broken, exhausted, destroyed, that need not be defeat. "Though our outward man is decaying, yet our inward man is renewed day by day." We have a glorious life within us which nothing in this world can touch. "We know that if the earthly house of our tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building from God, . . . eternal, in the heavens."

JULY 30

We labor, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of Him.—2 COR. v. 9.

THE Christian should always be a worker for his Master. "We are ambassadors therefore on behalf of Christ, as though God were intreating by us." The mission of every one who believes and is saved is to be a winner of other souls. Our life itself should be a gospel of divine grace, so full of love that every one who comes under our influence, even casually, shall hear a silent message, pleading, "Be ye reconciled to God."

The life must always be such an ambassador, first, before we speak a word. The most eloquent pleading will have no effect in winning others to Christ unless the love of Christ be first shown in our life. "God loves you and I love you," is the only evangel that will reach hearts. You cannot kindle fire with ice. A selfish man cannot preach a gospel of love to others. The love of God which we declare must be interpreted in human love which we show in our own eager interest in others. We must bear the cross in our own life, or we need not talk about the cross on Calvary.

God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforteth us by the coming of Titus.—2 Cor. vii. 6.

HOWEVER much we experience of the love of Christ, we all need human love. Paul lived very close to his Master. No man ever had more of Christ. Yet his epistles show continually a longing for human sympathy, and a need for the human touch in his life. He is telling here of the weight that was upon him in Macedonia. "Our flesh had no relief, but we were afflicted on every side." Then he tells of a great blessing which God sent. "Nevertheless He that comforteth the lowly, even God, comforted us by the coming of Titus." Titus was a dear friend, and his coming gave the apostle new courage.

We are all alike—we need human sympathy and love. This suggests to us one way in which we can help others. All about us are continually those who are disheartened, whom we can cheer and strengthen by encouraging words. No ministry we can choose in this world will mean more to others than a ministry of encouragement.

AUGUST 1

As ye abound in everything, . . . see that ye abound in this grace also.—2 Cor. viii. 7.

THE giving of money has no unimportant place in religion. It was distinctly said in the Old Testament that the bringing in of tithes and offerings would insure the pouring out of the Divine Spirit. Jesus made it plain that His friends must be ready to lay their money at His feet at His call. The members of the first Christian Church showed the most beautiful generosity toward the poor of their number, the rich selling their property and giving the proceeds to the apostles to supply the need of those who lacked.

In our reading to-day we have the lesson taught very plainly. The Master began it. Though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor, that through His poverty we might be made rich. Giving is a grace which may not be left out of the Christian life. The strong must help the weak. The love of God does not dwell in that man who, with plenty of his own, sees his brother have need and shutteth his heart's compassion against him.

AUGUST 2

Touching the ministering to the saints.—2 Cor. ix. 1.

JUDAS said that Mary was wasting her ointment when she poured it upon the head and feet of the Master. Jesus, however, defended Mary, saying she had wrought a good work on Him. Some people think that giving money to benevolent objects is wasting it. Paul shows us that what we give to God is never wasted. He uses the illustration of the seed when one sows in a field. It is not wasted—it grows up into a harvest. Our reaping shall be in proportion to our sowing. If we sow sparingly, we shall reap also sparingly. But if we sow bountifully, we shall reap also bountifully.

Miserliness is far away from the spirit of Christ. He who detects such a disposition ever beginning in him should instantly get it crowded out. There is a story of a Christian man, one of whose ships was delayed. He began to grow anxious about the possible loss, and he was so grieved with himself that he at once took the value of the missing ship and gave it to some sacred cause.

We dare not make ourselves of the number . . . that commend themselves.—2 COR. x. 12.

WE have nothing of our own to glory in. Glorying in one's self is self-conceit, and self-conceit is never beautiful —it is always unlovely. Even if a man's high estimate of himself is correct, it is not a beautiful thing in him that he should glory in his goodness, or his power, or his wisdom. We are in the habit of saying that when one knows he is bright, his brightness is dimmed. When a pretty child knows she is handsome, her air of self-consciousness mars the beauty. When Moses came down from communing with God on the mount, his face was shining. The people saw the luster on his countenance, but the record says, "Moses wist not that his face shone." The truest greatness is never aware of itself.

It is said of certain persons in heaven that the name of Christ is on their foreheads—on their foreheads, where all others can see it, but where they cannot see it themselves. Let us not glory in ourselves. "But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."

AUGUST 4

If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities.—2 Cor. xi. 30.

THE patriot soldier's best credentials are his wounds and scars. They are not disfigurements of which he is ashamed, but marks of honor, of which he is proud. An English soldier referred to his scars as his decorations. Paul speaks of his sufferings and persecutions and of the losses and trials he had endured as a minister as the credentials of his service, and as marks of honor and distinction. He even glories in them. "If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things that concern my weakness." In another of his epistles Paul speaks of these memorials of suffering and endurance as "marks of Jesus," which he bore branded on his body.

We are not at all accustomed to think in this way of the costs of our Christian discipleship. We are apt to complain of the things we have to suffer. But if we suffer for Christ, we may count ourselves honored. Jesus said, "Blessed are ye when men shall . . . persecute you."

AUGUST 5

My strength is made perfect in weakness.—2 Cor. xii. 9.

IT is comforting to think how fully our lives are in the hands of Christ, not only for protection, but also for spiritual discipline. The experience of Paul described in this chapter shows this in a striking way. He had a remarkable vision, being caught up to the third heaven. The danger now was that he should be exalted overmuch, because of the privilege he had enjoyed. To prevent this, there was given to him a "thorn in the flesh," to buffet him and to keep him humble. This "thorn" was a messenger of Satan, and yet was used in his spiritual discipline. He pleaded to have it taken away, but the request was not granted, because it was necessary to him. Instead of removing the thorn, however, the Lord assured him of the grace needed to enable him to endure. When he saw the meaning of it all and heard the divine promise, he began to rejoice in his weaknesses, since because of these he would have larger measures of the strength of Christ.

AUGUST 6

I seek not yours, but you.—2 Cor. xii. 14.

THE desire of all true friendship is not to get, but to give, not to be served, but to serve. In all Paul's letters we find that he is eager to do people good, never having the desire to be profited by them. We have this in these words, "I seek not yours, but you." He would not be a burden to them. It was not the part of children to lay up for their parents, but for parents to lay up for their children, and he was to them as a father. He would most gladly spend and be spent for their spiritual welfare.

Paul's interest in them was not fully appreciated, for the more he loved them the less did they love him. But this did not affect his care for them—he still loved them, and was ever eager to do them good. He sought not theirs, but them. This little sentence tells the whole story of true friendship. It is the true minister's motto. It should be every man's desire for his neighbor. It is always love's motto—"Not yours, but you."

AUGUST 7

I marvel that ye are so soon removed from Him that called you.—GAL. i. 6.

THAT which counts for most in Christian life is steadfastness, holding on through all discouragements, all hindrances. Some people make a brilliant start, and then lose their enthusiasm. That seems to have been the trouble with the Galatians. Paul says, "I marvel that ye are so quickly removing from Him that called you in the grace of Christ unto a different gospel." In another of his epistles he begins by thanking God for those to whom he was writing for their faithfulness, their loyalty; their devotion to the truth. But he begins this epistle by marveling at the lack of seriousness and of steadfastness in the Galatians.

When certain persons desired to become Christ's followers, He said to them, "If ye continue in My word, then are ye My disciples indeed." It is the continuance with Christ as believers and as His followers that proves our discipleship. We should have our feet on the rock and should cleave to Christ, whatever the pressure may be. It is a great thing to be fixed and stable.

AUGUST 8

I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.—GAL. ii. 20.

THE true Christian life is a re-incarnation of Christ. That is the way Paul puts it in the closing verses of our chapter. He had been crucified with Christ. Yet he was not dead. Rather, he was dead, and another lived in his place. "It is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me."

The man who lived in this house by the side of the road died recently and his house was left empty. But it did not long remain empty. Immediately another man moved in, a man with different tastes and habitudes. Everything is changed in and about the place. Roughness, bitterness, and selfishness have given way to refinement, sweetness, and love. Within the house are peace, song, and affection. Outside, sweet flowers pour their fragrance on the air. This is a wonderful picture of what takes place when a bad man becomes a Christian. The new life is Christ living in the man, and where Christ lives all is beauty and blessing. The old wilderness becomes a rose garden. Sin gives way to holiness.

Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.—GAL. iii. 26.

THERE is a great deal of struggling for honor and place in this world. Men think if they can get a few million dollars they have reached distinction. Or they think if they can get a high office they have won one of earth's best prizes. There are some also who spend their life in trying to get recognition in society. How pitiful all this must appear to those who look down from heaven upon this earth!

Paul shows us here what is really the highest rank to which man can attain. He says, "Ye are all sons of God, through faith, in Christ Jesus." To be a son of God is immeasurably higher than being in the most aristocratic circles. To be an heir of God is to be infinitely richer than to be the owner of millions.

When the disciples asked who was greatest, they were thinking only of earthly standards. To be like a little child is to be great. To serve others is the heavenliest occupation to which anyone can put his hands. To be Christlike is glory.

Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?—GAL. iv. 16.

PAUL did not have a very comfortable time with his Galatian Christians. It was not easy to get along with them. He was frequently required to be severe with them. They were not dependable in their moods toward him. To-day they would give their lives for him, to-morrow they were angry at him. "Ye received me as an angel of God. . . . I bear you witness, that, if possible, ye would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me." Then the next sentence reads: "Am I become your enemy, by telling you the truth?" They could not bear correction.

It is beautiful, however, to note Paul's mood toward them. He continued faithful in his friendship, always seeking to do them good. Thus only can we be true helpers of others. We must love them, not only when they love us, but also when they are offended at us for our faithfulness. That is the way Christ loves us and teaches us. He is always considerate and patient, and never wearies in helping us.

We through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.—GAL. v. 5.

ONE of the dangers of religious life is dependence on forms. People think that when they are keeping up certain rounds of service, certain ceremonials, they are meeting all the requirements of religion. Thus, in our Lord's day, there were those who were punctilious in their observance of the rites of their church, yet whom Jesus condemned unsparingly because their hearts were wrong.

Paul makes it plain that not forms, but life; make one a Christian. "In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith working through love." The question was not whether a man had conformed to the requirements of the Jewish law, or had not, but whether he believed on Jesus Christ, and whether his life was according to the law of love. We need to remember this in the testing of our own lives. It is not the particular church we belong to, and the religious ceremonies we observe, by which our spiritual state is determined, but our inner and outward life.

If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.—GAL. v. 25.

THE best way to get evil out of our hearts is to let good in. We have it in Paul's counsel: "Walk by the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh." If the Spirit leads us, it will be toward more and more of Christ; for He will kindle in our hearts more love for the Saviour, and we shall become more and more deeply interested in the work of Christ. The result will be that we shall care less and less for the world.

Dr. Chalmers preached a sermon on these words of Paul's, calling it "The Expulsive Power of a New Affection." A great love for Christ in a heart will expel all other loves that are not holy and pure. The evil things that are to be expelled are named in this same chapter. It is a terribly black list. The only way to keep them out is to get so filled with the things in the white list, that there will be no room for the evil things of the black list. Light drives out darkness. Love expels hate. Holiness displaces sin.

Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.—GAL. vi. 2.

THERE are two words here about burdens. We are told to bear one another's burdens. This is the law of love—called here the law of Christ. That is the way Christ Himself does, and that is also His law for us. No one is a Christian who is not at least learning to live in this way. That is love's way. Everyone we meet has some burden, some need, and we are to seek to be the helper of everyone in some way.

The other word seems to be just the reverse. "Each man shall bear his own burden." After all that we can do for others, each one has to live his own life, has to carry his own load. We cannot choose for any other, we cannot repent for another, we cannot believe for another. The gentlest, most loving mother cannot bear her child's pain, cannot do her child's duty, cannot get her child's sins forgiven. In the parable the wise virgins could not share their oil with the foolish. This was not disobligingness—it is the law of life, that each must bear his own burden.

He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world.—EPH. i. 4.

THIS is not a world of chance—it is our Father's world. Events do not happen without any order or any direction. No one can sanely doubt that there is a great divine plan running through the ages which includes all things and subordinates all forces and all experiences to itself. Our Scripture passage is full of this great thought. "He chose us in Him (in Christ) before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy." "Having foreordained us unto adoption as sons through Jesus Christ." "Foreordained according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His will."

We need not trouble ourselves to try to understand these great words, with their tremendous reach of meaning. We may say, however, at least, that they assure us of a divine thought for men, a divine love, a divine purpose of mercy, dating from this infinite past and running through the ages. And this truth assures us of our eternal safety in Christ our Redeemer.

All the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple.—EPH. ii. 21.

THE Church is a glorious spiritual temple. Christ Himself is the corner stone. Nothing is built safely in this world which does not rest on Christ. All these centuries believers in Christ have been built into the walls which are rising continually. The temple is not yet completed, and will not be until the last to accept Christ is built into it.

Everyone of us is a block on this mystic wall. Large stones and small are used. The smallest is just as important as the largest. If left out, there would be a place left empty where there ought to have been a stone. Each one has his place in the temple. Then, in turn, each of us becomes a foundation for others to build on. We must be sure that those who rest on us, trust us, depend on us, shall never be disappointed. The other day it was seen that the stones in a building were breaking. At one spot there had been a rotten stone, and it had crumbled and the stones over it had sunk. We must be good stones that never will crumble.

AUGUST 16

Be careful for nothing.—PHIL. iv. 6.

HOW to learn not to worry is one of the lessons everyone should master. Worry is a terribly wasteful experience. It uses up the strength we need for our duty. It unfits us for doing our work well. It is dishonoring to God, for He has promised to care for us, if only we do His will faithfully. Then it is utterly fruitless, for it does not take away the things it frets over.

The Bible gives many lessons on the subject, but none that makes plainer just how we are to eliminate worrying from our life than what Paul here tells us to do. First of all, we are simply not to worry. "In nothing be anxious." There is no room for exceptions, special circumstances, and all that. We are not to be anxious about anything. What then shall we do with the matters that we are disposed to worry over? Put them into the hands of God in prayer, and leave them there. If we do this the peace of God will guard our hearts, our thoughts, from all anxiety. It will be a great deal to us in every way to learn this lesson.

AUGUST 17

We . . . do not cease to pray for you.—Col. i. 9.

SOME people pray for their friends, but ask only for things of lower or less importance—that they may have good health, that they may get on well in worldly affairs, that they may prosper socially. These are proper enough blessings to ask for our friends, but they are not the first things. Paul, in praying for his friends, asks for them the highest and greatest things. He requests that they may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding; that they may walk worthily of the Lord unto all pleasing; that they may bear fruit in every good work; that they may increase in the knowledge of God; and that they may be strengthened with all power unto all patience and long-suffering with joy.

Could we do better than to pray Paul's prayer for our friends? These are blessings which we know they need and which God is willing to give to them. We need never fear that in asking for such things we are seeking for blessings that will perish in the using.

Who . . . fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ.—Col. i. 24.

THIS is a strange saying of Paul's in our reading to-day—that he must fill up on his part the afflictions of Christ. Was Christ's sacrifice insufficient for the redemption of the world? Was His work incomplete? Do others have to suffer also to fill up a lack in His atonement? No; on His cross He said, "It is finished." He paid the whole price.

What Paul meant was that while Christ had made a full and glorious redemption, His followers must enter into His experiences in order to present the benefits of His redemption. We can make men believe in the love of Christ only by loving as He loved. We can show them the cross truly only in our own lives. Christ gave Himself once to redeem the world; now we, His followers, must give ourselves to make His redemption real to the world. When we ask Christ to have compassion on men, His answer is: "I have had compassion—My part is finished. Now do you have compassion and reach and save men."

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above.—COL. iii. 1.

EVERY Christian life should have the upward look. The Greek word for man suggests one who looks up. If we believe on Christ we are one with Him, dying in Him. So Paul says: "If then ye were raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is."

Becoming a Christian, then, makes us a citizen of heaven. We live yet in this world, but our true home is above, where Christ is. Heaven's joys should be our joys. Heaven's life should be our life.

"Your life is hid with Christ in God." This means that we are sheltered in Christ. It means also our life has its sources of strength, of nourishment, of help, in Christ. Our hearts and eyes should be drawn away therefore from things earthly to things heavenly. We ought to live for things above. We ought to set our minds on things that are above, not on things that are on the earth. While we stay here for a little while, we are going on to heaven, where we shall live forever.

AUGUST 20

Do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.—Col. iii. 17.

IF we belong to Christ in heaven, we must make our lives here on earth correspond with the life of heaven. The things that we do should be the things they do in heaven. Our prayer is, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." So we are to mortify, or make dead, all the things in our lives that are not right, or that are not done in heaven. This includes all desires and all acts and dispositions that are not white and clean. We are to be in this world, walking in the midst of its evil, and are yet to keep ourselves unspotted from the world. The list of things we are to put away is a frightful one. It does not seem possible that we ever shall incline to do these things, and yet we are always in danger of doing them.

There are things also which we are to "put on," and these are all beautiful things —a heart of compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness: we should write off the list and keep it where we may see it continually.

Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt.—Col. iv. 6.

THE New Testament has a great deal to say about speech. Jesus spoke of men's words—idle words which have to be accounted for in the judgment, contemptuous words which bring upon him who uses them severe condemnation, words which test life—by which one is either justified or condemned.

Paul, too, refers frequently to speech. Here we have a very suggestive exhortation on the subject. Our speech should always be with grace. Grace means fitting, beautiful. We should learn to speak so that our tones of voice and our manner of speech shall be winning and attractive. Grace means also something under divine influence. We should speak words permeated with love and inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Jenny Lind said she always sang to God. A Christian should always speak to God, to please Him. Our speech should be "seasoned with salt." Salt purifies. Our words should be pure and cleansing—loving, gentle, helpful, inspiring.

AUGUST 22

I Paul have written it with mine own hand.—PHILEM. 19.

THIS is one of Paul's prison epistles. A prison is not an ideal place for usefulness. Yet no years of the apostle's life were more fruitful of good than when he was a prisoner. He wrote letters to the churches he could not visit, and to individuals he wished to help, and these letters not only carried blessings to those to whom they were first written, but they have been carrying blessings ever since to countless lives.

This letter was written in behalf of a slave, a runaway, who had come under Paul's influence at Rome and had been converted. The slave was going back to his old master, and the apostle wrote a letter to bespeak the man's kindly interest in his slave. We may write letters of congratulation when one has had some happiness, some new honor conferred, or has won some new success. We may write letters of sympathy to the sorrowing, of cheer to the discouraged, of thanks for kindness. It is good to have a pen with a golden nib, and to use it for the Master.

Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.—MARK xi. 9.

JESUS was the people's idol that day. Did He suppose that now at the last they were going to accept Him as their Messiah? No; He knew it was only the outburst of an hour, and that this triumphal pageant was but the first stage of His last journey to His cross. As He heard the song, "Hosanna to the Son of David," there was a deep undertone ringing in His ear:

> "*Ride on, ride on in majesty,*
> *In lowly pomp ride on to die.*"

The triumphal ride was our Lord's final declaration of His Messiahship. He fulfilled an ancient prophecy, and thus clearly announced that He was the King foretold.

We cannot but think of the fickleness of earthly enthusiasm. Five days later Jesus was led in another procession to His cross. A picture by Tintoretto gives the scene of the Crucifixion, after all was over. The crosses stand empty, the people are gone. In the background an ass is nibbling some withered palm leaves.

Grant unto us that we may sit, one on Thy right hand, and the other on Thy left hand, in Thy glory.—MARK x. 37.

WHEN we ask to be near Christ and to honor Him, we do not know what we are seeking. James and John were sincere in their love for Jesus and their interest in His kingdom, but they were ignorant of the nature of that kingdom. They had earthly ideas of it, and in asking for the highest places they were thinking of official rank. Still, they were sincere when Jesus asked them if they were able to pay the price. They said truthfully, "We are able." And they proved their words true. As the true meaning of the kingdom was made known to them afterwards, they did not falter, but drank the cup and accepted the baptism.

We think only of pleasure as we devote ourselves to Christ and begin to follow Him. We say we are ready for whatever the Master may have for us to do or to suffer. We do not know what we are pledging, but we need not hesitate. Anything of sacrifice or suffering for Him will be gain and glory in the end.

Whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name . . . he shall not lose his reward.—MARK ix. 41.

JESUS set up three monuments in His Gospels. One was to the widow who gave the two mites. Another was to the woman who anointed His head and feet, the story of whose deed is enshrined in the Gospels. The other is the one referred to here—the person who gives the cup of cold water to a disciple in the Master's name. It is not great things that make men great in heaven's sight -it is the love that is in what they do. The least act of kindness done in Christ's name is greater than the building of a city for personal glory.

Jesus loved children. He is always the children's Friend. He tells us that no crime is greater than causing a little child to stumble. Heaven is always on the children's side. The cry of a wronged child is heard in heaven. The children's angels have special and immediate access into God's presence at all times. Whoever else may have to wait God's pleasure any day, they are always admitted promptly.

Is a candle brought to be put under a . . . bed?—MARK iv. 21.

CHRIST wants His followers to let their light shine. He does not want them to hide it away, but to hold it where it will brighten the world. We are to be the world's light, to lighten the darkness. Goodness is light. Kindness is light. Christ himself is the Light of the world, and all who love Him become little lights which He kindles and which shine with something of His brightness. He wishes us to be like lamps, our light shining wherever we are. Grace begins in the heart in small and quiet ways, but grows in beauty, strength, and usefulness. The little leaven hidden in the lump works out till all is leavened.

Jesus is Master over the waves and winds. The wild storm had no terror for Him. He slept through it all because the peace of God was in His heart. When He was wakened He quieted the wind and stilled the waves by a word. We need not be afraid in any storm, for Christ can control it and can keep us from being hurt by it.

The sower soweth the word.—MARK iv. 14.

WHAT comes of all the sermons? The parable of the Sower helps us to answer. Only on one kind of soil did the seed sown come to anything, while that sown on three other kinds of ground failed to produce any harvest.

It is the same with the good seed of God's Word. Some of it never gets into the heart at all. Birds pick it off as soon as it falls. Some of it starts well enough, but has not root sufficient to hold it amid temptation or persecution. Some of the good seed gets a deep rooting, and would yield a fine harvest, but for other things already in the heart, preoccupying it, so that the wheat is choked out. Love of money, love of pleasure, the frets of life, and other things, crowd out the growing grain, so that none of it can ever come to ripeness.

We should seek to be good soil, that the word sown in our hearts may grow and yield fruits of righteousness. The words of God are heavenly seeds, and where they grow, plants from heaven's gardens are produced.

AUGUST 28

The Son of Man is Lord also of the Sabbath.—MARK ii. 28.

JESUS remembered the Sabbath day, and kept it holy. But He did not put Himself under the burdensome rules and regulations which His people followed. He taught them that the Sabbath was to be man's friend, not his taskmaster. In His own observance of the day, He attended the church services and took every opportunity to speak His Father's words to those who were present. He went on with His ministry of kindness and helpfulness on the Sabbath, just as on other days—healing the sick, casting out demons, delivering those who were in trouble.

If we follow the example of Jesus, the Sabbath will be a blessing to us and not a burden. Some people find it a day of wearisomeness. But if they loved Christ in such a real way as to find delight in His company and in His work, the day would prove to be one of pleasure to them. Its purpose is to prepare us physically, mentally, and spiritually for the life and work of the week days that follow.

Jesus perceived in His spirit that they so reasoned within themselves.—MARK ii. 8.

CHRIST sees into people's lives and knows all that is going on in them. He saw faith in the men who brought their friend to Him that he might be healed. Then He saw into the man's own life, its past and its present, and knew that the paralysis was not his worst trouble, that he needed more to have his sins forgiven than to have his sickness cured. He also read the thoughts of the scribes. They reasoned in their hearts, and Jesus knew their thoughts. Then He saw in the publican the qualities which fitted him for being an apostle.

It should be both a restraint and an encouragement for us to think that Christ knows all about us—the most secret things, that we can hide nothing from Him. It should make us most careful how we live. Then it should be an inspiration to us, encouraging us always to be faithful. He knows when we try, though we fail. He knows when we are sincere, though in our weakness we do wrong. He knew that Peter loved Him, though he had denied Him.

It was determined that we should sail into Italy.—Acts xxvii. 1.

GOD has many ways of getting His servants to their work. Now, missionaries are usually sent by mission boards. Paul went to his field at the cost of Rome. We may safely leave ourselves in God's hands and let Him both give us our work and guide us to it. Though a landsman, and also a prisoner, Paul seems to have known more about what it was safe to do and what unsafe than any other man on the ship. It must have been through divine enlightening that he admonished the centurion of the danger of the voyage, urging him not to leave Crete.

Paul had good reason for exhorting the ship's company to be of good cheer. On that storm-tossed vessel he was in communication with Heaven. An angel of God had assured him that night that he must stand before Cæsar. Therefore he could not perish in the sea. Moreover, in answer to his prayers, all his companions would be spared, too. God's hand rules the storms, and we may always trust in His love and care.

My manner of life from my youth . . . know all the Jews.—Acts xxvi. 4.

IT is a great thing when a man can confidently appeal to his own past. Paul could challenge his enemies to find anything against him from his youth up. The only way we can be ready to make such appeal is to watch all our years, from the youngest.

It is a great thing when a man has a religion about which he is sure. Too many people's religion is vague. Paul knew Him whom he trusted. He knew that He was the Messiah, the Saviour, and told Agrippa why he knew it, and why he had given his life to witnessing for Christ to all men.

Some people talk in these days as if the thought of the raising of the dead is incredible. Paul did not think it an incredible belief. God has all power—can He not bring up from death those who have died? If He can create from nothing, can He not bring back the dead?

Jesus gave Paul no time for grief over his terrible mistake. "Arise, and stand upon thy feet!" He was to show his penitence not in tears, but by service.

SEPTEMBER 1

He went and beheaded him in the prison.—MARK vi. 27

JESUS knows how His followers can best serve Him. He sent the apostles out to teach and heal. John the Baptist, however, He permitted to be seized, to languish in prison, and to be put to death.

We should be willing to serve our Master in the way He points out. He may want us to give a long life to active usefulness, or He may want us to serve and honor Him by enduring persecution and suffering wrong.

The life of John seemed to be a failure. He preached only a few months. He was a great preacher, too, and hundreds went to hear him. It seemed to his friends a pitiful waste of life, an irreparable loss to the heavenly kingdom, when he was murdered. But John's work was done—all he was sent into the world to do. There really was no reason for his living an hour longer. When one dies in youth, we are apt to deplore his departure as untimely, but no mistake is made. "Every man is immortal till his work is done."

Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away. Mark xiii. 31.

THE Christian need never fear any calamities or judgments that can possibly come. Our Lord here foretells great destructions and troubles that would come upon the country. But He told His disciples not to be afraid. No harm should come to them. They were only to take heed not to be led astray. If they would continue faithful, they should be kept in perfect peace through all the perils. "He that shall endure to the end, the same shall be saved."

History tells us that when the terrible calamity came upon Jerusalem no Christians perished in the awful destruction, because they had been forewarned of the coming disaster and had obeyed their Master's command, all leaving the doomed city before the siege began, and finding safe refuge.

Always those who believe in Christ and obey His word are safe in any danger. Though the earth itself should be destroyed, God's children are safe in His love, from which nothing can separate them.

As they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it, and gave to them.—MARK xiv. 22.

THE last day of our Lord's life on the earth was full of sacred memories. In the evening was the Last Supper. Jesus craved to be remembered. He was human, and none of us want to be forgotten. We desire especially to live in the hearts of those we love. Jesus gave the Holy Supper to be kept always, as a feast, in memory of Him.

If we always remember Christ, it will keep us faithful to Him. He wants us to be as true and loyal in the midst of our week day cares and temptations as we are when sitting at His table. Remembering Christ will also transform us and make us like Him. Our thoughts make us. They are the builders of our character. If they are white and pure, they will build a temple of marble in us. If they are spotted and stained, they will make our lives spotted and stained. If we always remember Christ, we will grow up into the beauty of Christ. That is what the Lord's Supper is meant to help us to do.

SEPTEMBER 4

He cometh, and findeth them sleeping.—MARK xiv. 37.

ONE of the saddest elements in the Gethsemane experience was the disappointment of Jesus in His disciples. He asked the three most loved of them to be near Him in His great agony. He craved the help of their sympathy. But when He came back to them, hoping to be strengthened by their love, He found them asleep.

A legend of the Brittany peasants tells how the robin got its red breast. As Jesus was being led out to Calvary, a bird, pitying Him, flew down and plucked one thorn from the crown of thorns He wore. The blood spurted from the wound and splashed the bird's breast. Ever since, the peasants say, the robin has had a spot of red on its breast in remembrance of its pity for the Master that day. The disciples had it in their power that night, not to pluck thorns from their Master's brow, but to strengthen Him by their sympathy. They missed their opportunity, however, and only made Gethsemane harder for Him.

Pilate . . . released Barabbas unto them, and delivered Jesus . . . to be crucified.—MARK xv. 15.

PILATE'S was a most unenviable distinction. No doubt he felt honored when he was made governor of Judæa. But the honor brought him a responsibility which proved his undoing. Pilate did not know, when he was called up so early that April morning, that that day was doomsday for him. He did not realize that he was about to make such a record of infamy for himself. He would better a thousand times have missed the honor of being governor and thus have escaped the making of the terrible mistake he made that day.

The way Pilate put the question was, not "What is right?" the only question a judge should ever ask, but, "What will advance my interest?" It was here that he wrecked all. To-day he is gibbeted before the world as a judge who consciously sent an innocent man to a cross. A writer represents Pilate as washing his hands forever, and looking at them to find them forever stained. The spot will never wash off.

SEPTEMBER 6

Who shall roll us away the stone?—MARK xvi. 3.

THE love of the women friends of Jesus shines out very brightly in all the story. He had healed and blessed them, and they followed Him from Galilee, ministering to Him, doing things for Him. They watched by His cross and wept by His grave. They had no hope or thought of His resurrection, but they loved on in their bitter disappointment, and sought to honor His body as it lay in the grave. They were sorely disappointed when they found not the body. But suppose they had found it in the grave! Their disappointment was the world's hope. The good news the angel told them quieted their fears, and dried their tears, and they went forth to be the first messengers of the resurrection.

It is interesting that Christ's first appearance was to a woman, one who loved most because she had been blessed most. The appearances of the forty days left all the disciples convinced that their Lord had risen indeed, and now believers all over the world rejoice in a living Saviour.

SEPTEMBER 7

That ye should earnestly contend for the faith.—JUDE 3.

THIS little epistle is full of warnings against disobedience and unbelief. It is well that we remember always that those who live in sin shall perish. The closing lines of the epistle are full of hope and encouragement for those who keep themselves in the love of God, and look for the mercy of Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

The benediction is singularly beautiful and rich in its assurance. Jesus Christ is able to keep us from stumbling in all our journey through the world. This is a wonderful promise and assurance. Life is full of dangers and temptations. We cannot keep ourselves. Heaven is promised to us, but heaven is far off and the way is perilous. How can we ever get there? Christ will care for us, keep us not only from falling, but even from stumbling. There is something else He will do—He will set us before the glory of God without blemish, at last. This twenty-fourth verse alone makes the whole epistle worthy of the place it holds in the sacred Scriptures.

SEPTEMBER 8

I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision. —Acts xxvi. 19.

HEAVENLY visions are given us to show the possibilities of our lives. They are not meant to discourage us by their brightness and their beauty. They are revealings of what we may become, and we should be instantly obedient to them.

Paul is an example of a man who puts his beliefs at once into practice. Truth never was to him for mere ornament—it was something to be lived. When he saw his duty, he did it.

If we would think of all Christ's teachings, all glimpses of heavenly things, in this way, we would not live as so many do live—on life's low levels. Agrippa seems to have sneered at Paul's personal appeals as if the preacher would have made him a Christian like himself. But why not? Paul wanted every man to be a Christian. He was not ashamed to be a Christian himself, and he saw no reason why anybody, even Agrippa the king, should be ashamed to be what he himself was—"except these bonds."

SEPTEMBER 9

They cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished for the day.—Acts xxvii. 29.

IT is well always to carry anchors with us. We do not know when our only safety will be in casting anchor. It may be in a business matter. It may be in a friendship. It may be in the drift of our life away from Christ. It may be in a feeling of anger—if we do not check it, it will carry us to some rash act which we shall forever regret. In any time of uncertainty, we should throw out anchors and wait for light.

Though God is guiding us, the human part must never be neglected. Paul had said not a life should be lost, yet here he says that if the sailors fled, the ship could not be saved. The cargo, tackling, and furniture had to be thrown out in order to save the ship. It often happens that the only way we can save our lives is to sacrifice possessions.

One of the finest scenes in the Bible is that of Paul looking up to heaven and giving God thanks before he broke the bread on the storm-swept ship.

The barbarous people shewed us no little kindness.—ACTS xxviii. 2.

GOD'S promises never fail. Not one person was lost on the ship that bore Paul. They were saved for his sake. The men were not landed in a very easy and graceful way, but every one of them got ashore safely.

There is a great deal of human tenderness in this world, even among rude people and those who do not know Christ. Paul's company received "no common kindness" from the people on the island, though these were barbarians. Suffering touches hearts everywhere, making all kin. Nobleness of character reveals itself in all circumstances.

Through all the terrible voyage Paul's rare personality shone out. Here on the island we find him gathering sticks for the fire. One of Christ's promises to the disciples was that if they took up serpents they should not be hurt. This was fulfilled to Paul. If in doing our duty we are required to be among things that are dangerous, we may trust God and not be afraid. Nothing can harm us if we are doing God's will.

Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him.—Acts xxviii. 30.

GOD'S purposes never miscarry. Paul was to go to Rome. The obstacles appeared insuperable. Even the elements seemed to be in league to prevent his reaching there. But through all hindrances the way was opened, and at last he entered the "Eternal City."

A prison life is not an ideal one for a missionary. But Paul's imprisonment did not limit his usefulness. Indeed, the fact that he was thus under the protection of Rome made him safe from persecution. That was God's way of providing for him. We are apt to think of shut-in days as lost time. One looking at it only superficially might say, "What a pity Paul had to lose those two whole years in prison!" But perhaps no other two years of Paul's life yielded better returns. From his prison he preached to those who came in. Then four of his epistles were written during that time, and they have been blessing the world now for nineteen hundred years.

Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit.—MARK v. 8.

JESUS met the fierce demons that no man had been able to control, and they yielded to Him without resistance. There is no power of evil which is not subject to His sway. This ought to be a comfort to us in our effort to save wicked men. We cannot change them, but Christ can. This is the faith that makes missionaries confident as they go among the heathen. Christ can save the worst of them, changing them into quiet, peaceable, and gentle Christians. Some people say they have such bad tempers that they cannot learn self-control. If they will only put their ungovernable tempers into the hands of Christ, He can tame them, as He tamed the demoniac.

The people of that neighborhood seem to have been angry because they lost their swine. They would rather have had the demon remain in the man than to have given their swine to have the man cured. We ought to be glad to see such a man freed from the power of evil, whatever the cost may be to us.

SEPTEMBER 13

Jesus went with him.—MARK v. 24.

JESUS is always quick to respond to calls for help. He went at once with Jairus when his little daughter was dying. But He is never in a hurry. Although the child was at the point of death, when a poor woman in the throng touched the hem of His garment, with a heart-cry for healing in the touch, Jesus gave heed to her and gave her the blessing she sought. He even lingered to talk with her. By the time He had done this, it seemed that He had waited too long, for word came that the child was dead. But Jesus is just as able to restore the dead as He is to heal the sick. So His delay in reaching the ruler's house resulted in a greater work, when He raised the dead child to life, than if He had hastened and had kept her from dying.

We need never be afraid of Christ's delays—He never tarries too long. We may learn a lesson, too, on the beauty of wayside work. When we are going somewhere on an errand of business we may find opportunities of doing others kindnesses on the way.

There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him.—MARK vii. 15.

IT is right for us to preserve cleanness of body. A filthy person is not a good Christian. But it is still more important that we have clean hearts. It is not enough to honor God with the lips—we must worship Him with our heart. A man may work in a coal mine or a foundry, and have blackened hands and face, and yet have a white heart, be pure, sincere, and true in the inward parts. On the other hand, one may have a body washed with water, and yet have a black heart. If we would please God we must have our hearts pure, even if our bodies are necessarily soiled because we have to work in dust or soot.

The glimpse Jesus shows of the interior of the human heart is not flattering. It is a nest filled with all manner of evil things. There is a good deal of talk in some quarters about social rank. A man who works on the streets or in certain occupations is rated away down in the scale. But nothing really degrades a man but sin.

SEPTEMBER 15

He could not be hid.—MARK vii. 24.

JESUS cannot be hid. Wherever He is, people know it. There was a great burden on this Gentile mother's heart, the burden of a demoniac child. When she heard that the Healer was near her, she saw her opportunity and seized it. She believed that He could heal her child, and she was determined to get the blessing while He was within reach. It would be well if all mothers were as earnest in seeking spiritual blessing for their children as this mother was in seeking the casting out of the demon.

There are other impediments in speech and hearing besides those named in these verses. Some men cannot speak for God, nor can they hear God's words as He speaks to them. Many who profess to be followers of Christ seem never to be able to speak a word for Him. God gives them messages, but they remain silent, and souls are lost for want of a word which they might have spoken. We should seek the freeing for use of all our abilities, for power to its last particle is duty.

SEPTEMBER 16

They bring a blind man unto Him.—MARK viii. 22.

THERE are different kinds of blindness. People are led along the streets whose eyes see nothing of all the beautiful things in the natural world. Then there are people who have splendid eyes for the things of nature, but who are blind to spiritual things. This blindness is far worse than the other. Our prayer should be, as we go about through God's natural world, "Open my eyes to see also the lovely things of the spiritual world."

There is a story of a man who lived beside the sea and who was always speaking to his neighbors of the blue mountains beyond. They saw no mountains, and thought he was only a dreamer. But one day he sailed away to visit these mountains. The people laughed at his delusion, as they thought it, but by and by he came back, bringing rich treasures —gold, silver, and precious stones —which he had gathered. The things of the spiritual world are real, if only our eyes are opened to see them.

SEPTEMBER 17

Why could not we cast him out?—MARK ix. 28.

THE disciples were baffled and defeated that night while the Master was absent from them. When the father came with his boy, they could not cast out the demon. We are strong only when Christ is with us; we are weak when He is absent from us. Yet the disciples need not have failed in their effort. Jesus chided them for their lack of faith. The father also showed little faith, for in his request he said to Jesus, "If Thou canst do anything, have compassion on us, and help us." Jesus replied, "If thou canst! All things are possible to him that believeth."

The father's little faith stood in the way of the child's restoration. It must often be so, that lack of faith in parents keeps blessings away from their children. This is a startling thought, that our want of faith may keep blessings from others. Our prayer should be that of this father's: "I believe; help Thou my unbelief." A Christian should always be able to do impossible things, and only through faith can one do such things. Nothing is impossible if we believe.

Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness.—PHIL. ii. 29.

IT is pleasant to look up the little biographies of good men that we find imbedded in Paul's letters. There is so much that is deep and abstruse in some of his doctrinal discussions that we are apt to think of him as a sort of doctrinaire, without much of the genial, loving side of life in him. But when we study his letters we discover our mistake. He loved people, he needed friends, he always saw the best that was in them.

The little story of Epaphroditus that we have in this chapter is very interesting. Paul appreciated him. Nor did he forget his kindness—he had ministered to his needs. He was the messenger from the Philippian church, and had brought tokens of love to the apostle from his old friends. He had been taken sick, too, in Rome, but God had mercifully spared him. Now he is returning, and is to carry this letter. This kindly mention of Epaphroditus shows us how somewhere, if not in books, every kindness any of us does is written down.

SEPTEMBER 19

I press toward . . . the prize.—PHIL. iii. 14.

THE best ever lies before us if we are truly following Christ. Life is a mountain climb, and we never get to the summit in this world. Paul tells us that he has not yet reached the end of his race. But he is pressing on with inexhaustible energy and enthusiasm. He forgets the things which are behind.

Some people live altogether in their past. They tell you over and over of the great things they have done. Paul had done a great many brave and noble things, but he forgot them all, never talked about them, did not take time to record them—he was so eager to get on and to attain loftier heights, to do greater things, to win greater victories. Before him lay the goal with the prize of life, and to this he pressed continually.

It is a noble picture, this old apostle, at an age when many men are talking about "the dead line," still reaching forward and holding his eyes fixed on the real goal of his life far ahead. We ought not to lose the lesson.

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.—PHIL. i. 21.

IT is a splendid watchword for life that Paul gives us here—"To me to live is Christ." A great many people could not fill out the sentence in that way, if they were to write honestly the purpose and motive of their life. Some would write, "To me to live is to make money," or "to have pleasure," or "to get fame," or "to gratify my appetites."

Every Christian should be able to make Paul's word his own—"To me to live is Christ." This means that the one purpose of our living is to honor Christ, to serve Him, to do His will, to love and obey Him, and to advance His kingdom. When one lives thus, one never questions the wisdom of any use of His life Christ may make. If He wants us to work, that is well. If He lays us aside to suffer, it is all right. If He sets aside our plans, we do not complain. Whether He leads us into sorrow or into joy, it matters not. Our life is His, and whatever pleases Him is right.

I thank my God upon every remembrance of you.—PHIL. i. 3.

IT has been noted that the Philippian church never gave Paul any anxiety. Most of the churches founded by him lay heavily on his heart at some time or other. They had quarrels, and he had to be peacemaker. Or there were cases of wrongdoing, and he had to bear the burden. But the Philippian church was happy in itself. There were no wranglings, no dissensions. Paul got only joy and comfort from this church. Here he thanks God for it.

It is a great thing to live so as to be a comfort to our friends, to those who love us and live for us. It is a great thing for a church to be a joy to a pastor, never to put thorns into his pillow. It is a great thing for children to be a comfort to their parents. A father was just saying that not one of his children—now all married and settled in life—has ever caused him an anxious day or a sleepless night. Why should we not set for ourselves the aim always to be a comfort to our friends?

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord.—EPH. vi. 10.

STRENGTH is commended in all the Bible as a duty. We are never exhorted to be weak. God is very patient with weakness, but He would have it brought to Him, and then it becomes strength.

Paul exhorts us here to be strong in the Lord. Life is not easy for us. All its best things have to be won in struggle. Only he that overcometh can receive the reward. It is a comfort to us to know that He in whose name we are to be strong is the Mighty One. He overcame the world, and thus is able to help us in all our battles. No one ever can be defeated who has Christ for his Friend and Helper.

Those who would enter the battle must put on the whole armor of God. They must not only fight, but must also stand in defense when assailed—and oftentimes it is harder to stand than to fight. If we would be strong we must be true and must keep right with God. Apart from Christ we can do nothing; in Christ we can do all things.

We are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones.—EPH. v. 30.

NOTHING in this world means more to God than a beautiful home of love and prayer. Our chapter for to-day is given to suggestions as to the making of a home. Each member of the family has a share. There is the husband's part. He must love his wife and give himself for her, as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it. This is a high order of love. The wife has a part. She is to love her husband and live for her home. There is a part also for parents. They live for their children. They care for them. They train and teach them. They show them how to live. They are the revealers and interpreters of God to them. There is a part also in the home-making for the children. They are to obey their parents. People sometimes say facetiously that in these days the commandment runs, "Parents, obey your children." Where this is the interpretation, it is an unhappy reversal. The true Christian home is one in which love rules, and where each one fills his own place.

SEPTEMBER 24

Now are ye light in the Lord.—EPH. v. 8.

WE are able to walk in this world as children of light. Light stands for all that is beautiful, true, right, and good. Darkness is the emblem of all that is wrong, evil, unbeautiful, unholy.

As Christians we belong to the kingdom of light. We should so live that our lives shall always give out light. We are the light of the world. We are to make life brighter for others. We are to be a comfort to those who are in sorrow. We are to live so as to make the way plain to some who do not know where to go or what to do.

It would be very sad if any persons in darkness should look to us to learn how to live, and find our light not shining. If the light in a lighthouse were to go out some night, ships might be wrecked. If our light fails to shine even for a little while, we know not who might perish in the darkness. We are children of light, and dare never to have our lamp grow dim.

Ye have not so learned Christ.—EPH. iv. 20.

CHRISTIANS are not to live as other people do. Something far better is expected of them. They have come out from the world, and they are to show the world an example of heavenly life. They are no longer to "walk as the Gentiles also walk."

Those who have learned Christ should put away all the evil things of their former life, and be renewed in the spirit of their mind. They should put away falsehood and speak truth with their neighbors. If they get angry they should be sure not to hold hate in their hearts overnight. "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath." If they had ever stolen, they should steal no more, but should earn by honest labor whatever they get. They should keep special watch over their speech, never speaking any corrupt words. They should utter only words that will do good, imparting grace, making people happier and better. They should be careful never to do anything to grieve the Holy Spirit. They should keep their hearts free from all bitter thoughts and should be kind to everybody.

He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers.—EPH. iv. 11.

"TO each one his work." Some are apostles, some evangelists, some pastors, some teachers, some helpers only in small ways. But every Christian has something to do. If the smallest wheel in a watch fails to do its part, the watch stops. If the least Christian in a church neglects his duty, the whole church suffers. No one should ever say, "My little work will not be missed, I am so small and weak." No one is unimportant.

The purpose of the Church is the perfecting of the saints. We all begin as little children—only babies—but we are not to continue infants. It is a sad home in which the baby never grows, and at four or five years of age is a baby still. Yet there are Christians four or five years old who are no farther on than when they were born. The work of the Church is to stimulate the growth of each Christian and develop and train him so that he will attain "unto a full-grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

SEPTEMBER 27

Unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.—EPH. iii. 20.

IT is a comfort to us to know, when we pray, that God is able to do for us all that we ask. Paul tells us that He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. This is not saying that He will actually give us everything we ask for. We ask sometimes for very unfit things. We think they would supply our wants, or satisfy our heart-hungers, or give us the joy we lack. But really they would not. Perhaps they would do us harm. God will not give us these things, no matter how earnestly we ask for them.

We may plead to have some impending trouble or burden averted. God is able to do it—we are sure of this. But it may be that His love for us requires that we bear the burden or endure the sorrow. We may be sure, therefore, that there is nothing we may ask which God could not do. If He does not do what we wish, we know that it is better it should not be done.

I will shew thee my faith by my works.—JAMES ii. 18.

IT is not enough to have an intellectual faith. There are people who will believe all the Bible, so far as assent to its teachings is concerned, and yet who are not a whit the better for it. The only faith that is of any avail is that which draws the life after it in obedience. We must show our faith in our works, and by our works. One may seem very sympathetic when need is before him, but if he does nothing to relieve the distress, his sympathy is only a pretence.

Abraham was the great prince of faith, and when he began to believe in the true God he left home and country and followed the divine bidding over a trackless way, without question. The son of promise had been given to him, but when he was commanded to offer this son on the altar, he did not question the command nor ask how it could be consistent with the promise, but instantly obeyed. If we believe God, we must surrender our lives to Him absolutely.

When they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes.—LUKE v. 6.

CHRIST is able to help us in our business affairs as well as in our spiritual matters. The disciples had been fishing. They had toiled all night, and their nets were empty in the morning. Jesus told them that if they would push out farther and drop their nets in a certain place, they would find plenty of fish. They did as He asked them to do, and were rewarded.

Some people seem never to learn that they can have God's guidance in their secular affairs. A young woman was trying to find something to do. A friend, after advising her, asked her if she had taken the matter to God. "Why, you would not pray about a matter of this kind, would you?" That is precisely what we should do. God is interested in everything in our lives, in our smallest daily affairs, as well as in our largest spiritual interests. Jesus tells us that the very hairs of our heads are all numbered. This means that nothing in our lives is too small for God's notice.

They went upon the housetop, and let him down through the tiling.—LUKE v. 19.

WE should be earnest in helping others. We have a splendid example in the story of the four men who brought their neighbor to Jesus. This neighbor was a paralytic. He never could have got into the presence of the Healer without their aid. These men carried him to where Jesus was that day. They found such a crowd about the door that they could not enter. But that did not discourage them. They were determined to have their friend healed, and when they could not get in they carried him to the roof and, opening a way, let him down into the very presence of Jesus.

If we were as eager to do others good, we would not be easily disheartened in our efforts. The truth is, we try languidly to help our neighbors, and nothing comes of our efforts. If we really love people, we will stop at no cost in trying to do them good. The good Samaritan is another example of this. He is Christ's own illustration of what it means to love our neighbor as ourselves.

OCTOBER 1

Of them He chose twelve, whom also He named apostles.
—LUKE vi. 13.

JESUS was a friend to everybody. Yet He chose twelve men whom He took into very close companionship. These men made up His personal family. He received from them the blessings of friendship, which all men need in their busy life. The chief reason why He chose the twelve, however, was that He might train them, so that when He was gone they could carry on His work. He still went about speaking the words of life to the multitudes, but He gave the most of His time and thought to those He had chosen. They were to be His witnesses, and must see His life and hear His words, in order that they might be capable witnesses.

We should note that Jesus spent the whole night in prayer before choosing his friends. In nothing do we need more to pray than when we are choosing our friends and companions. If there was more prayer for wisdom and guidance in the forming of friendships, there would be less regret and fewer heart-burnings afterwards.

He lifted up His eyes on His disciples, and said.—LUKE vi. 20.

CHRIST came into the world to set up the kingdom of heaven here. The laws of this kingdom are the laws of heaven. The Beatitudes contain the substance of these laws. We should study these ideals of character, and then seek to get them into our own lives.

To be poor in spirit is to be lowly, to forget self and think of others. Posing as humble will not do—humility must be real. Hunger of spirit is dissatisfaction with present attainment and longing for something better. Sorrow brings comfort, and comfort is one of God's best gifts. It is worth while to have sorrow that we may receive the comfort. The hate of men does not seem desirable, and it is only when it is for the sake of Christ that it brings blessing. Loving enemies is not an easy lesson to learn, but it is the Christlike way. If we are to be like our Master we must learn to love as He loves. The important thing in all this teaching is to get the lessons down out of heaven into our common daily life.

When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not.—LUKE vii. 13.

WHEN Jesus was here He touched every phase of the world's need. The Roman soldier found Him able to heal his slave without even going to the house. The widow, following her son to the grave, does not seem even to have known of Jesus before. His meeting with the funeral procession seems to have been accidental. We know, however, that it was not accidental on the part of the Master. He knew of the woman's sorrow, though He was far away. His heart went out to her in sympathy because she was a widow, and because he whom she was carrying to the grave was her only son. Then He directed His path so that He would meet the sorrowful procession before it reached the burying-place. There was no funeral that day, and the procession was changed to one of joy.

So Christ does always. Even when we do not call upon Him for comfort, He meets us with His blessing. Christ has not left the earth—He is still here.

OCTOBER 4

Her sins, which are many, are forgiven.—LUKE vii. 47.

THE love of Christ has power to change the worst sinner into the whitest saint. The woman we see wetting the feet of Jesus with her tears, and anointing them with ointment, was a poor outcast a little while ago. One writer represents her as going along the street that day in her gay attire, and getting a glimpse of Jesus through the window of the house where He was being entertained by the Pharisee. That look shrivelled her to nothingness; her old self was dead and gone forever. The same instant a new woman sprang up in her, in place of the old, and a moment later she was at the feet of her Saviour. Her tears told of her penitence. Her ointment, costly and fragrant, told of honor, love, and gratitude. It represented her best—all she had she gave to Him who had rescued her. It was what was left of the old life, and she gave it to her new Master.

We all need the blessing which this woman got, and we can get it if we come with penitence to Christ's feet.

An inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you.—1 PETER i. 4.

THE children of God are heirs to a glorious inheritance. It is not an earthly inheritance, but a heavenly. It is not given to them in full possession in this world, but is reserved for them in heaven. They could not receive it here—they have a pilgrimage to make to get to it. But while the inheritance is securely kept for them in heaven, they have the promise of guardianship on the way. They are kept by the power of God through faith.

All our life in this world is intended to prepare us for receiving our inheritance. If we have troubles, we need not be afraid—we may rejoice in them all. If we have dangers, we need not be dismayed—we have the promise of protection. Some day we shall see Christ, whom now we love but cannot see. Heaven is sure for all who are faithful in this world. If we do God's will and do not lose faith, we shall be kept in safety through this world and brought at last home to our inheritance.

OCTOBER 6

As strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts.—1 Peter ii. 11.

THE assurance of the heavenly home awaiting us should make us want to live worthily in this world. There are things we should promptly put out of our lives if we are pilgrims on our way to our promised land. We should cleanse our lives of all hypocrisies, all that is not sincere and true. Envies are not fit feelings for a Christian to cherish on his way to heaven, for he cannot take them through the gate.

"Evil speaking" is also set down among the things that we should put out of our lives. There is a good deal of evil speaking among people who want to pass as followers of Christ. One hears it in almost every circle —criticism of absent ones, uncharitable words about them, sometimes bits of gossip that are not beautiful. We ought to train ourselves to do here the things we shall continue to do when we get home. It is certain that there will be no evil speaking there. We would better let this kind of speech drop altogether out of our lives, and speak only words of love.

OCTOBER 7

Likewise, ye wives. . . . Likewise, ye husbands.—1 PETER iii. 1, 7.

THE religion of Christ has its definite teachings for everybody. In this chapter wives and husbands come in for lessons of their own. The Christian wife should want to win her own husband for Christ. In this she can do best, not by perpetual nagging, but by making her own life so attractive, that her husband will be convinced of the reality and the power of the Christ that is in her.

It is right for the wife to dress beautifully, but the adorning that will give her the widest influence as a winner of souls is not that of the body—the braiding of the hair, the wearing of jewels, or the putting on of showy clothes. A woman's real adornment is not of the body, but of the life and character; as Peter puts it, "the incorruptible apparel of a meek and quiet spirit."

There is a word here also for husbands. They are to be gentle, patient, kind, thoughtful, using their strength for the comfort and help of their wives. In this lesson lies one of the secrets of a happy wedded life.

OCTOBER 8

Above all things have fervent charity among yourselves.—1 PETER iv. 8.

WE call John the Apostle of Love, but the other New Testament writers give equal emphasis to the duty of Christian love. The most wonderful chapter ever written in order to extol love is by Paul—the matchless thirteenth of First Corinthians. Then Peter also exhorts that "above all things," that is, even above prayer, we are to be fervent in our love among ourselves, for love covereth a multitude of sins. That is, love overlooks even a multitude of faults and flecks and sins in others.

This lesson cannot be repeated too often. We do not naturally love people—it is something we have to learn to do. If Paul's definition is to be regarded as the standard, most of us have a good deal yet to learn about loving before we reach it. Peter also makes the lesson strong, exhorting us to be fervent—that is, warm, tender, affectionate in our loving of each other. The only way to get such Christian love into our lives is to let Christ's own love into our hearts.

Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. — 1 PETER v. 5.

PERHAPS there is special need for this counsel in these days. Nothing is more beautiful than to see young persons attentive and respectful to the old. It may not be easy to take slow steps with an infirm aged person, but the time lost in the journey is well spent.

Max O'Rell somewhere has a word about the attention of a daughter to her father. He speaks of it as one of the most beautiful things one sees, and perhaps as rare as beautiful. Mothers get a great deal more attention from their children than fathers do. That is well—they deserve it; but fathers, too, hunger for love and for kindness from their children, and it is well worth while for a bright girl or a happy boy to give a tired father a measure of care and attention now and then.

Humility is the keynote of this chapter. The young are exhorted to be subject to the elder. We are all exhorted to gird ourselves with humility; then we are to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God.

OCTOBER 10

Add to your faith virtue.—2 PETER i. 5.

OUR lesson presents us with a splendid sum in addition. The graces are to be added, one to another. Faith comes first; but faith cannot stand alone, so we add to our faith virtue—that is, manliness, with all the noble qualities that apply to manliness. Next we are to add knowledge—knowledge, of course, of the true kind, wisdom for life, spiritual knowledge, knowledge of God and of God's will. Self-control comes next—this is the key of all noble life. No matter how strong we are, or how much we know, if we have not self-control, something is wanting. He that can rule himself is strong, while he that lacks self-mastery, no matter what other gifts he may have, is pitiably weak. Self-control produces another element—patience, patience in suffering. Another quality to be added to patience is Godliness — Godlikeness. Then comes brotherly kindness — affectionateness to those among whom we mingle. Last of all —love, the crowning gift and blessing. To have these elements of character is to be ready for life.

Many shall follow their pernicious ways.—2 PETER ii. 2.

THIS chapter is full of painful pictures. Life has its unsoothing side. Sin is in the world, and wherever there is sin there will be sorrow. But in the midst of this chapter of warnings is one sentence which brings great comfort to those who are exposed to dangers and sufferings: "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation." No matter amid what enmities and perils, we have to live we need not be afraid. The wise man says, "The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe." The Psalms tell us that under the shadow of God's wings we may take refuge, that the Lord is our keeper, and that He who keepeth us never sleeps.

Some people think they cannot be good in the place they live because of the evil about them, but Christ knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation wherever duty calls them to go. We may never choose to live amid dangers, but if our duty calls us into such places, we may be sure of protection.

I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance.—2 PETER iii. 1.

IT is well that our minds shall be often stirred up and kept in remembrance of things we ought not to forget. Jesus recognized this when He gave the Lord's Supper. We cannot conceive how much the Communion has done through the Christian centuries to keep the name of Christ precious in this world of care and sin.

Some one visiting the studio of an artist observed some highly colored stones lying on his table. When asked why he had these stones always before him, the artist said it was to keep his eye up to tone. For the same reason we need to keep before us always high ideals of life. Otherwise our minds are apt to drift away from the things that are best. Some one says that the little sentence, "That will do," has done more harm than any other sentence in the English language. Being satisfied with the thing that merely "will do" is fatal to our doing the best. It is well, therefore, to have our pure minds continually stirred up by way of remembrance, "lest we forget."

Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.—JAMES i. 2.

NOT all of us understand the meaning and purpose of temptation. We think of it as an effort of Satan to destroy us. That is what Satan intends, but that is not God's intention concerning temptation. Jesus was not only tempted, but He was led, driven, by the Holy Spirit to His temptation. He could not be our Saviour until He was tempted—that is, tried and proved. So we read here, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation." The beatitude is not for him who has not been tempted, but for him who has met temptation and has been victorious.

It certainly seems a strange thing to read that we should count it all joy when we fall into manifold temptations. We regret to see our friends come under sore temptation or to have to be tempted ourselves; but we learn here that we may even count it joy to have the experience. Temptation is therefore an opportunity. Blessings lie beyond it which cannot reach in any other way but through the experience of temptation.

OCTOBER 14

The tongue can no man tame.—JAMES iii. 8.

THE tongue is a troublesome member. It is a very important member, however. With it we can do great good. Our words, if they are true and loving, carry blessings wherever they are heard. But the tongue is hard to control. When we have really got our tongue under control we are almost perfect. One who can govern his speech can govern every other part of his life. A small bit keeps a spirited horse in check; a little rudder turns a great ship in its course; so the tongue, though so small a member, controls the whole life. The tongue is harder to tame than wild beasts. There has been but one Man who never spoke foolishly, rashly, bitterly. Jesus never did. His words were all clean, sweet, helpful, and inspiring.

We ought to set ourselves the task of mastering our tongues, for then we can do untold good with them. Only Christ can help us to do it. He mastered everything—demons, diseases, winds, waves, death itself, and He can help us to master the most unruly tongue.

OCTOBER 15

Be ye also patient.—JAMES v. 8.

THE lesson of patience is not easy to learn, yet it is important that we should learn it. Impatience is the secret of many sad failures. Impatience is letting go when only by holding on can we succeed. A man spent a fortune in drilling for oil. At last he got discouraged and sold his well for a trifle. The new owner started the drill, and in two hours found a great flow of oil. If the first man's patience had held out those two hours, he would have found success.

Many people miss answers to their prayers by giving up a little too soon. Our lesson teaches us to be patient in waiting for blessing in our work. The farmer sows his seed and waits for the harvest to come. Months pass, but his confidence in the laws of nature makes him patient, and at last he reaps his reward. We have the promise of God for blessing upon those who will be faithful. We should never doubt, whatever the delays may be. Only those who are patient can get the blessing.

He shall be great in the sight of the Lord.—LUKE i. 15.

GEORGE MACDONALD says, "To have been thought about by God, born in God's thought, and then made by God, is the dearest, grandest, most precious thought in all thinking." John the Baptist was thought about before he was born. His life was a plan of God. What he was to do was marked out for him before his birth. In another Gospel we read of him, "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John."

We are not to suppose either that there was anything peculiar about John in this regard. His life was no more planned for beforehand than yours or mine. Every one's life is a plan of God. We do not come into this life on any haphazard chance of a career. Every one who comes is sent from God. Every one was made for something, some work of His very own, which no other one can do, with a place to fill and a definite task to perform. The most beautiful and complete life, therefore, is one that realizes God's purposes for it.

Hail, thou that art highly favored: . . . Blessed art thou among women.—LUKE i. 28.

MOTHERHOOD is always sacred. To be the mother of any child is a holy privilege for a woman. But to be the mother of Jesus Christ, the world's Messiah, was the highest honor ever granted to any woman. Mary was blessed among women. When a great man is wanted for some place of responsibility, God first chooses a noble woman to be his mother, and puts into her heart and life the gifts that are necessary to fit her for her sacred task. We often hear it said of a good or great man that he had a good mother.

The woman who was chosen from among all women to be the mother of Jesus must have been divinely gifted for her mission. No wonder the angel said to her, "Hail, thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee." Mary's words when she was told that she was to be the mother of the Messiah are very beautiful: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word." She was awed by the announcement, and accepted it humbly.

That we should be saved from our enemies.—LUKE i. 71.

THE salvation which Christ came to make for the world is perfect. First it delivers us out of the hand of our enemies. We are under condemnation, and it sets us free. We are in death's prison, and this salvation liberates us.

But deliverance from condemnation and death is not all of Christian hope. We are set free that we may serve our new Master. Jesus says, "Take My yoke upon you." We are made free from other masters by coming under the rule of the Divine Master. We are saved to serve. Our service, however, is not to be selfish, nor servile, nor compulsory, but glad, joyous, voluntary, under the constraint of love. We are to serve Him by obedience—"in holiness and righteousness." There is no other way of receiving the divine salvation but by the acceptance of Christ's mastership, which implies obedience in all holy things and in all holy ways. No one willingly living a sinful life can claim to have received Christ.

OCTOBER 19

I bring you good tidings of great joy.—Luke ii. 10.

IT was a wonderful night in which Jesus was born. The outward conditions were not remarkable. No great display was made. No quieter event took place anywhere in the world, that night, than the birth of the Son of God at Bethlehem. The only revealing of glory was what the shepherds saw as they kept their watch over their flocks, when an angel came and told them of the wonderful occurrence, and when, a little later, a host of angels came and sang the first Christmas song. The shepherds came quickly into the town to search for the newborn Saviour, but they found nothing but plainness and poverty. In a manger, on a bundle of hay, they found the child, wrapped in swaddling clothes, sleeping its first sleep of peace.

Thus quietly began the kingdom of heaven in this world. It is ever so—the greatest events make the least noise. The kingdom of God always comes quietly. It begins in us, perhaps, in a gentle wish, which by and by becomes a beautiful life.

Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.—LUKE ii. 52.

THE little that is told us of the first thirty years of the life of Jesus is very suggestive. We have only a few glimpses, but they are full of meaning. The record of the first twelve years is all comprised in one sentence: "The Child grew, and waxed strong, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon Him." He grew as other children grow. There was nothing precocious about Him.

At twelve years of age He went to His first Passover. Then the record of the following eighteen years is told in another single sentence: "Jesus advanced in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man." We know that He was subject to His parents, thus teaching a great lesson which every child ought to learn. We know that He was a carpenter. People often wonder that He wrought no miracles in those years; but miracles are not the only revealings of divineness. The divinest thing in life is to live sweetly, patiently, unselfishly, obediently, in plain and holy ways.

Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit.—Luke iv. 14.

ONE reason that Jesus was tempted was that He might know by experience what temptation means to His followers. In one of the galleries of Europe there is a picture of an angel standing near the empty cross, after Jesus had been buried, touching with his fingers the sharp points of the thorns in the crown of thorns. The artist's thought is that the angel had looked on the sufferings of Christ with wonder. He could not understand them. The angels never have suffered, and hence there is nothing in the angel nature or experience to interpret suffering. This angel in the picture is pressing his fingers upon the sharp thorn-points, trying to discover what pain is.

It was necessary that Jesus should suffer Himself, that He might understand our sufferings. He was tempted in all points that He might sympathize with us in our temptations. Nothing means more to us in the great struggles of our lives than to remember that Christ has felt what we are feeling, and sympathizes with us.

They in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath.—LUKE iv. 28.

SOME people are never willing to see the good there is in others, nor to give them the honor to which they are entitled. This was the trouble with the people of Nazareth. Jesus had grown up among them. In a village all one's life is open to everybody. Some boys and young men commit indiscretions in their early years, which are remembered against them when they are older. But there was nothing in the young days of Jesus which could be recalled to shame Him. He had lived so beautifully, so sweetly, so lovingly, that no one could say anything against Him. By and by He came back to visit His old neighbors. Everybody was talking about Him, and the fame of His life and work had been heard in His old town. But His former neighbors would not see in Him the things others saw in Him. They would not believe that He was the Messiah.

Many people show the same spirit in these days. They refuse to see anything beautiful or good in others.

The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.—JOHN i. 14.

THE most wonderful event in the history of the world was the coming of God in human flesh to dwell among men. The "Word" was in the beginning, that is, from eternity. Then in time the Word became flesh and lived among us. That is what took place that quiet night at Bethlehem when Jesus was born.

Wonderful was the life that dwelt for three and thirty years on earth. Jesus Himself interpreted it when He said, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." As we read the beautiful story of the life of Jesus and see His gentleness, His patience, His unselfishness, His abounding kindness, we are looking at God revealed in simple, human ways. In no other way could we ever have learned the character of the invisible God. In the incarnation He came down and lived among us, and now we know how easy it is to get to God, how loving and patient and merciful He is, and how ready He is to help us. The Christ of the Gospels is the God with whom we have to do.

The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.—JOHN i. 37.

THE Church of Christ had a very small beginning. Two young men went home with Jesus one day and learned that He was the Messiah. One of these two men was Andrew. In the eagerness of his joy he sought his own brother, and told him that he had found the Messiah. Then we have this little note. "He brought him to Jesus." It took only a few moments, but tremendous results followed.

This brother whom he brought was the Peter of the New Testament. We do not know when we bring anyone to Christ what we are doing, what this person may do for the world. Andrew seems not to have been a very great man himself, and not to have done a vast amount of work as an apostle. But if he never did anything but bring his fisherman brother to Christ, that was worth living for. To bring one man to the Saviour and to start him on a career as a Christian is a service of incalculable value. It is the starting of a life on a career of blessing for the world.

This beginning of miracles did Jesus, . . . and manifested forth His glory.—JOHN ii. 11.

IT is said that in doing this beginning of His signs, Jesus "manifested" His glory. The glory was there before, the power to do great things, but not till now was it revealed, manifested, put forth. It is said that He "manifested His glory." Glory means power, brightness. This glory seems here to have been only simple kindness. A host, in the midst of his wedding feast, discovered that the wine had run out. We can imagine his dismay and his embarrassment. How could he explain it to his guests? No man wants to seem mean on the occasion of his wedding. Then Jesus came to His friend's relief and used His "glory," His divine power, to change the water into wine.

The glory of Christ was shown as truly in the smallest words of comfort, in taking little children in His arms and blessing them, as it was in His raising the widow's son or Lazarus. So we show just as much love in doing the commonest kindness as if we were to do some great thing.

OCTOBER 26

The same came to Jesus by night.—JOHN iii. 2.

NICODEMUS has been blamed for coming to Jesus at night, but there is no ground for the blame. It would be the best time for a quiet talk with Jesus. Jesus Himself did not blame Nicodemus for coming by night. Indeed he did well to come at all. A good many men do not think that Jesus can do anything for them or that they need Him in any way. Nicodemus set a splendid example which all prominent men might follow.

It is interesting to note the things that Jesus talked about with His distinguished visitor. One was the new birth. We can be in the kingdom of heaven only by having a great change wrought in us. Heaven must first come down to us, or we never can get into heaven. The way to have this change take place in us is to receive Christ as our Saviour, and then the Spirit will enter into our heart and live there. Nicodemus was himself born again, for at the last, when Jesus was dead, he came with Joseph to honor Him before all the world.

OCTOBER 27

He must increase, but I must decrease.—JOHN iii. 30.

BEFORE Jesus came John had great popularity. After Jesus began to preach, the throngs fell off from John and turned to Jesus. John's disciples were vexed by this. They thought Jesus was not dealing gratefully with John, in drawing the people from him. John's answer was very noble. "I am not the Christ, . . . I am sent before Him." He said further that he was not the bridegroom, but only His friend.

It was not easy for John to see the people leave him and go after Jesus. It is never easy, when one has been first, to take a second place and to keep on working as faithfully and as sweetly as ever. Some persons who have been chairmen of committees, or presidents of societies, and have worked nobly in these positions, are never of any use after that—they cannot take the lower place after being in the higher. John teaches us to be just as sweet, faithful, and earnest, when we are no longer in the prominent place as when filling places of honor.

OCTOBER 28

If thou knewest the gift of God.—JOHN iv. 10.

THE Samaritan woman did not dream of the power to help and to bless there was in the lowly peasant that sat on the well-curb that day. If she had known, there was nothing she could not have received from His hands. A little later she learned who it was, and did receive much.

We are missing life's best things continually because we are not aware of the glory that is ever close to us. Mrs. Browning tells us that every common bush is aflame with God, and that while those who see take off their shoes, the rest sit round and eat blackberries. "The days come to us," says Emerson, "in endless file, but to each of us they offer gifts: bread, kingdoms, stars, and sky that holds them all." But many of us see not these glorious gifts in the common days, and take only a few herbs and apples, missing the rare things we might have chosen. If we only knew how near Christ is to us continually, we would not go on unblessed as we do.

My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me.—John iv. 34.

THE life finds its true food in doing the will of God. Jesus taught the same truth in His answer when tempted to make stones into bread. He said, "Man shall not live by bread alone." The disciples had left Him hungry now by the well. They come back and find Him not needing food, and He explained it by saying, "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me." He had been feeding a starving soul, and that had fed His own hunger.

The secret of a well-nourished spiritual life is, obedience and service. Sin never satisfies, for it is disobedience. Selfishness never satisfies, for only he who loves lives, and love seeks not its own, but always the other man. If we do the will of God we shall find food for our souls in every obedience and every sacrifice of love. If we would learn the secret of living without weariness, we must learn to do the will of God. This is the hidden manna which nourishes all who eat of it.

Speak thou the things which become sound doctrine.—TITUS ii. 1.

THE gospel of Christ has its special word for each person. It does not have the same message for every one. There is something here for old men. They have passed through many experiences, and they ought to have learned wisdom; they should be temperate, grave, sober-minded, with chastened spirit, good judgment, and be patient with all. There is a word here for old women—they should be reverent, charitable, careful in speech, helpful to neighbors and friends. There is a duty for younger women, too—they should be good wives, good mothers, good home-makers, living so worthily that they will be an honor to Christ. Christian young men, also, have a place all their own to fill. They should discard the follies of the world and be thoughtful, sober-minded, full of good works, like their Master. There is a Christian duty also for servants and employees, who are to be faithful, even if their masters are not kind, in all things adorning the manner of Christ.

The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men.—TITUS ii. 11.

CHRISTIAN duty touches all relations of life. It does not have to do only with communions and prayer-meetings. It includes all our actions. It tells us the kind of citizens we ought to be, how we should treat rulers. It tells us how we should live with people, that we should not speak evil of any one, that we should not be contentious, but be gentle, showing meekness and patience even toward those who seem not easy to get along with. Once we were not Christians, and did not know the law of love, but lived in malice and envy, hateful and hating others. But now the kindness of God and His love have touched our lives, and we are to put away the things of our old life.

A gardener found a lump of fragrant clay, and when he asked, "Whence thy fragrance?" the answer was, "One laid me on a rose." When the love of God touches our lives we ought to absorb its spirit, its sweetness. Christian duty teaches us to live the life of Christ amid the world's evil.

The grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant.—1 TIM. i. 14.

SOME one has said that to him the greatest wonder in the story of divine grace was that he himself had been saved. Paul seems to have felt the same wonder regarding himself. He had been a blasphemer, a persecutor; yet Christ had chosen him for His service. In this the grace of Christ abounded exceedingly.

Note also what the apostle says as to the reason why he had been thus saved: "Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me as chief—chief of sinners—might Jesus Christ shew forth all His longsuffering, for an ensample of them that should thereafter believe on Him." That is, the reason Paul was forgiven and made a preacher was that no other sinner need ever despair. If he could be forgiven, after all he had done against Christ, anybody could be forgiven. Christ saved the chief sinner that lesser sinners ever after might have confidence as they sought mercy. But every one of us may also wonder why we are saved, for not one of us is worthy.

That thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God.—1 Tim. iii. 15.

IT is important that those who occupy official positions in the Church shall be worthy, and that they fittingly "behave themselves in the house of God." The minister should be without reproach. His name should be like ointment poured forth. He should be "temperate," using the word in its broader sense; he should have his temper, his speech, his feelings, his appetites, under complete mastery. He should be sober-minded—not long-faced, but serious, reverent. He should be apt to teach; gentle, not contentious. He should be well spoken of among those who are outside.

Other church officers are under scarcely less holy sanctions. Deacons must be grave, not double-tongued, not greedy for money, holding faith in a pure conscience, and living a blameless life. Holiness becometh God's house, and all who are active in its affairs should be reverent, sincere, and worthy examples to all who look to them as their leaders. Unfit behavior in official church members hurts Christ's cause.

NOVEMBER 3

Neglect not the gift that is in thee.—1 Tim. iv. 14.

WE should make the best possible use of our gifts and talents. Timothy was exhorted not to neglect the gift that was in him, referring to his ordination to the ministry. When a man is thus set apart his holy office is a gift. Then there are gifts which are part of one's natural endowment or come through education and experience. Whatever gifts of any kind we possess, we should use, not neglecting them.

In another place Paul exhorts Timothy to stir up the gift of God that was in him. The words suggest a fire banked up, not burning brightly, needing to be stirred up. Timothy was not living at his best, was not making the most of his life.

There are many Christian people who are good, but not nearly so good as they might be. They are useful, doing good service, but they are capable of doing a great deal more. The fires of their love, their earnestness, their enthusiasm, need stirring up. No gift or capacity of ours should be neglected or buried.

NOVEMBER 4

Rebuke not an elder, but intreat him as a father.—1 Tim. v. 1.

IT takes a great deal of tact to tell others of their faults so that good will come from the telling. Not many people accept reproof or criticism kindly. Many resent any and every suggestion of fault or blame. One would think that children would be glad to have their parents tell them of their mistakes, but even children are too often vexed by words of reproof, however gently given.

If only we could see how we might be benefited by learning of our faults, we should rejoice when anyone points out something in us that is unbeautiful. But most of us are proud, and it hurts us for any person to tell us of anything in us that is a blemish. So it requires all the wisdom and delicacy of touch we can command to administer reproof. Some people just blurt it out, without any attempt to do it gently. If we have to give reproof, we would better do it in as kindly a way as possible. Paul suggested that an elder should not be rebuked but exhorted, and that gently.

Godliness with contentment is great gain.—1 Tim. vi. 6.

CONTENTMENT does not mean satisfaction—with our great natures we never can be satisfied. Being contented does not mean that a person enjoys discomforts, hardships, narrow circumstances, sufferings. That would be unnatural. To be contented is to accept one's condition and circumstances, whatever they may be for the time, without complaining or fretting, making the best of them.

In another place Paul speaks about his own experience in attaining this grace. He says, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therein to be content." He had learned to be independent of conditions. He had in his own heart the resources for quiet and peace, so that in the barest circumstances he did not fret. It is interesting to notice that Paul says he had learned to be content. This suggests that it did not come to him naturally, but was something he had to learn. He intimates to Timothy that he who is contented is rich, though he have only godliness. Discontent is poverty, though a man have millions.

NOVEMBER 6

The unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice.—2 TIM. i. 5.

THERE is something in genealogy, after all. It is a fine thing for a young man to have had a good mother and a godly grandmother. This does not mean that a man is necessarily good because of the faith that dwelt in his grandmother and his mother. Goodness cannot be passed down like an estate. Some very bad men have had most pious ancestry. At the same time, it is fitting when in successive generations piety is found. A young man with worthy ancestors owes it to them to be worthy. He should keep unspotted the white name he receives. We are responsible for the carrying on of the work which they have begun.

Paul was persuaded that the faith of his grandmother and mother was also in Timothy. It should always be so with young people with Christian parents. Those who have a noble inheritance, of memories, influences and teachings, should be better than those who have not had these blessings.

Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.—2 Tim. ii. 1.

ONE of the secrets of a true life is readiness to endure. Anybody can begin well—it is he who continues to the end who wins success. We are to be soldiers of Christ; soldiers must know how to endure. Softness and luxury belong not to a true life. Some mothers would keep their boys out of all hardness, away from all struggle, but that is not to make men of them. Imagine a soldier in training, who is kept out of battles, lest he might be hurt! Paul spoke of himself as one who contended in the games. He wished to reach heaven, but he knew that heaven had to be won on the battle-field of life. "If we endure, we shall also reign with Him."

In the letters to the seven churches, in Revelation, all the blessings offered to the faithful lie beyond lines of battle, and the only way to reach them is by entering the struggle and enduring till we receive the crown. Nothing worthy can be reached by him who has not learned to endure.

NOVEMBER 8

From a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures.—2 Tim. iii. 15.

IT is a great thing to be brought up on the Holy Scriptures. No other book can do for a life what the Bible can do. It is able to make one wise in the truest way—with a wisdom that saves one by bringing him into fellowship with Jesus Christ.

The Word of God has in it an efficacy no other book in the world has. It is profitable for teaching — instructing in holy things, the things of God and eternal life. It is profitable for reproof, convicting us of sin and declaring God's judgment against evil. It is profitable for correction, not only showing us our faults, but leading us away from them, freeing our lives from errors and making straight what was crooked. It is profitable for instruction in righteousness, telling us how God would have us live, what qualities of character He would have us attain. One who is trained under the tuition of the Scriptures will come to a complete man, furnished for usefulness and prepared for doing whatever good work he may be called to do.

NOVEMBER 9

I am now ready to be offered.—2 Tim. iv. 6.

IN this chapter we have the last words of Paul sent from his dungeon. But they are not the words of a defeated man; rather, they tell of victory and triumph.

He was lonely. He was suffering from the chill of his dungeon, and wanted his cloak. He tells of his standing before the emperor, when all forsook him, and no one took his part. Yet he was not alone in that trying hour, for the Lord stood by him and strengthened him. He knew he would soon meet death, but he knew where he was going —"The Lord will deliver me from every evil work, and will save me unto His heavenly kingdom." He spoke of his violent death as an oblation to God and as a departure. He spoke of his life under three figures—a fight, a course, a trust. He looked backward with consciousness of approval—he had fought well in the battle; he had run his course to the goal; he had been faithful to the trust committed to him. He looked forward with joy and confidence; there was a crown waiting for him.

Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.—MATT. vi. 10.

SOME people quote this petition always as if it meant only submission to some painful providence. They suppose it refers only to losing friends or money, or to adversity or calamity. But it is for the *doing* of God's will, not the suffering of it, that we here pray. It is easier, however, to make prayers like this for other people than for ourselves. We all think others ought to do God's will, and we do not find it a difficult prayer to make that they may do so. If, however, we offer this prayer sincerely, it is for ourselves, that we may do God's will. We can pray it, therefore, only when we are ready for implicit, unquestioning obedience. Or it may mean the giving up of some sweet joy, the losing of some precious friend, the sacrifice of some dear presence, the going in some way of thorns and tears.

We should learn always to make the prayer and then to hold our life close to the divine will, never rebelling or murmuring, but sweetly doing or bearing what God gives us to do or bear.

The Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two.—LUKE X. 1.

CHRIST has a great business in hand. He wants the gospel carried to every home in the world. He needs human messengers for this work. No doubt angels would be glad to go on such errands, but angels would not do. Only those who have been saved by Christ can tell others of Christ. He would send us out, and we should be ready to respond, "Here am I," when we hear His call.

To go in Christ's name is to represent Him. We need to have that love in our hearts that Jesus had when He went among the people. Then when Christ sends us, He will care for us and help us in giving our message. If we do not go where Christ wants us to go, people will miss the blessing. Some one said to a boy, "If God really loves you, why does He not tell somebody to give you a pair of shoes, or coal to keep you warm this cold weather?" The boy said, "I guess He does tell somebody, but somebody forgets." We need to be ever quick to go on our Master's errands, "Lest we forget!"

NOVEMBER 12

Who is my neighbor?—Luke x. 29.

LOVE to our neighbor seems at first an easy lesson to learn. But when we begin to study it, it grows harder. There is more of the lesson than we thought. We like to pick our neighbors, and we are sure to choose people who are congenial.

How to love our neighbor is taught in the parable. It is easy to have a sort of universal love—a love for everybody, a love we can exercise in our quiet home, looking at people in the distance, but not coming near to anyone. It is not just the same, however, when we go down among the people, and find our neighbor in some disagreeable person we cannot like, but waiting for our help, or in some enemy in need. The Good Samaritan found his neighbor in a hated Jew bleeding by the wayside. He had to get down in the dust and stanch his wounds, and then carry the man to an inn and pay the bills. It often costs a great deal to love a neighbor. The lesson is written out in full at the close: "Go, and do thou likewise."

When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven.—LUKE xi. 12.

IT is a great thing to know that we really may pray. The name Father is assurance enough. Certainly if God is our Father He will hear, and love to hear, His children's cries.

The Lord's Prayer teaches us that we are not to put our own needs first. Count how many petitions there are before we get to "daily bread." Most of us put our own wants first and then God's name, kingdom, and will far down the list.

We must also be earnest in praying. The man wanting bread got it, not because it was his friend's door at which he was, but because he would not stop knocking. He knew there was bread in that house, and he was bound to get it. So our Master would have us stay at our Father's door, asking, seeking, knocking. The blessings we need are in His hands, and we can get them if we continue in our importunity. We are sure of our Father's love, too—that He wants to give us what we need, that He will never offer us anything but the best.

NOVEMBER 14

I wish the finger of God cast out devils.—LUKE xi. 20.

WE need to have One stronger than the strongest to guard us against danger. There are robbers who go about seeking to take from us the treasures of our lives. It will not do to have a pigmy on guard. If we do, the robbers will overpower him and rob us. The only safe thing is to have Christ as the Guardian of our lives. He is able to defend us against all enemies.

It is not enough to have the devil in us driven out; an empty house is not protected. The evil will return and take possession again. That is the way some persons try to change their lives. They cease doing things that are wrong, but put nothing in the empty place. Soon they tire of the new way of living, and go back to the old evil things. The only safe way is to give up the evil and fill life and heart with good things. Empty the heart of hatred, bitterness, envy, and jealousy, and let Christ in and live there and make it His home. Napoleon used to say, "To replace is to conquer."

When the Pharisee saw it, he marveled that He had not first washed before dinner.—LUKE xi. 28.

SOME persons are a good deal more careful about manners than morals. Jesus disregarded a conventional custom at the Pharisee's dinner that day, and the host took the matter very much to heart. If he spoke his criticism in the hearing of Jesus, he gravely violated the law of courtesy. A host must show the greatest regard for the feelings of his guest, and must take no notice of mere violations of etiquette.

The answer the Master gave to the Pharisee's criticism made it clear that morals are very much more important than manners. He told His host that the Pharisees were more careful about outside matters—forms and ceremonials; but meanwhile their inward part was full of extortions and wickedness. It is all right for us to be refined in our manners, to conform to the conventionalities of society, but in showing contempt for those who neglect these niceties of etiquette, we sin against them and grieve the Holy Spirit.

There is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed.—LUKE xii. 2.

CHRIST wants genuineness in His friends and followers. The sin which He condemned most unsparingly when He was on the earth was hypocrisy—men trying to pass for what they were not. There is still a great deal of hypocrisy in the world, and there is still the same need for insisting upon genuineness and sincerity.

Jesus shows how useless and unavailing it is to try to cover up things and to seem to be what we are not. There is nothing covered up that shall not be revealed, nothing hid that shall not be made known. People commit sins in the darkness, sins that would blacken their names if they were known. They suppose nobody suspects what they are doing in secret. But some day everything will come out. Even now secret evil works out, and blots and stains the life. The only safe way to live is to be sincere, genuine, true down to the bottom of one's heart, always as good and true in the secret things as in the most public things of life.

Seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink.—LUKE xii. 29.

WORRY makes a great deal of unhappiness in the world, and does a great deal of harm. Jesus says, too, that we need never to be anxious about anything. He gives reasons, also, why we should not be. We need not worry about food and raiment. God feeds the birds, and His children are of more value than His birds. He clothes the lilies in matchless beauty, and we are certainly dearer to Him than the loveliest flowers.

Worry does not take away the things which trouble us. It unfits us for the best service. If our brain is feverish through anxiety, and our hand unsteady, we cannot do anything well. If we are really God's children, we need not give ourselves any concern about the things we need. All we have to do is to seek God's kingdom and His righteousness—that is, do our simple duty, as it is made known to us—and then God will take care of us. We often concern ourselves about God's care of us, while we neglect our duty to Him.

NOVEMBER 18

Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord when He cometh shall find so doing.—LUKE xii. 43.

ALL things in life are uncertain. We never know what will be on any to-morrow. We expect to live for many years, but we may die to-night. We have large plans for work in the future—plans which it will take us many years to complete. That is right. Because we may die to-morrow is no reason why we should not lay out work that it will take us a long while to finish. At the same time we should live every day so that if that day should be our last, it will be a good day for the ending of our life.

That is what Jesus meant when He said we should be always ready for His coming. The only way a servant can be surely ready for his Master, not knowing when He may appear, is to do his work faithfully every day, keeping all things continually in perfect order, so that he may never be surprised, however suddenly the Master may come, and so that when the Master comes He will not find things unfinished or in disorder.

Suppose ye that these Galilæans were sinners above all the Galilæans, because they suffered?—LUKE xiii. 2.

THERE is a mystery in suffering which no one can fathom or understand. In ancient times the belief was that troubles were punishment for wrongs committed. We cannot tell why there is so much pain in human life. We may be sure, however, that if we accept our trouble, it will leave a blessing in our lives.

There are many sufferers who are blessed above measure through their pain. I remember a woman who for fourteen years had not walked a step. She sat in her chair, unable to lift hand or foot. Every joint in her body was drawn, and she suffered excruciating pain continually. Yet I never saw such patience, such uncomplaining quietness. Her face shone as if it had been transfigured by a holy light burning within. She was a benediction to her household. There poured out from her room an influence which softened all the home hearts. There is a blessed ministry of suffering whose influence we never can realize in this world.

NOVEMBER 20

He went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem.—LUKE xiii. 22.

JESUS was always going about doing good. He did a great many miracles, but there is reason to believe that, for every miracle he wrought, He performed a thousand little common kindnesses. Our verse for the day tells the story of we know not how many of these little kindnesses as He went through the hamlets and country places. No doubt each of the villages through which He passed was enriched by His coming. He left sicknesses healed, sorrows comforted, homes brightened, children blessed. For weeks and months the people would talk about His visit and the kindnesses He wrought.

Sometimes Jesus would take a long journey just to help one person. For example, His visit to Nain was made for the purpose of meeting a mother on her way to the grave with the body of her only son. He met the funeral procession and restored the boy to his mother. We should be ready to go leagues just to wipe away a tear or give relief to a sufferer.

Whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after Me, cannot be My disciple.—LUKE xiv. 27.

THE condition of discipleship is absolute devotion to our Master. Jesus does not mean that anyone is really to hate father or mother, or wife, or children, but that all other persons and all interests shall take second place. Christ Himself must have the first.

The great want of Christian life is a more complete surrender. We cannot serve two masters. If we choose to serve the world, we cannot serve Christ, for He accepts no half-hearted devotion. When Jesus says that if we will not renounce all we have we cannot be His disciples, He means everything that stands in the way of our discipleship. If He bids us give up anything, we are to do it. He means also, that all we are and all we have shall be absolutely His, at His disposal. This kind of Christian life is what is meant by good salt. The salt that has lost its savor is nominal Christian life, with so much of the world mixed in it that the Christian part of it is scarcely distinguishable.

When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran.—LUKE xv. 20.

IT seems strange to us that any son should be so foolish as to leave a good home of love and happiness for a far country, with its disappointment, debasement, and degradation. But it is always the story of human sin. The part of the teaching which concerns us most is the return of the lost boy, and the way he was received by his father when he came back. A vision of the old home came to him in his want and wretchedness, and that drew him back. He came to himself and saw his folly. He was then brave enough to confess it and come home.

The boy's reception is a picture of the way God receives those who come back from sin's wanderings. The father was watching, and saw his returning boy far off. He ran to meet him. God is ever watching for the first thought and act of penitence, and hastens to meet the returning one. We may be glad that this parable is in the Gospel, for no one need ever be afraid now to come back to God.

There was a certain rich man. . . . And there was a certain beggar.—LUKE xvi. 19, 20.

IN this world the rich man seemed to have the better of it. He had all that human heart could wish, of wealth, splendor, luxury, and power. The beggar had a hard time. Nobody cared for him in his need—the only friends he had were the dogs.

But things were changed when the two men crossed the line. The beggar died first. Nobody mourned him, and there were no flowers, but he was carried by the angels into the place of blessedness. The rich man died too—death cannot be bribed. He had a great funeral, with pageant and splendor. He was lauded as a prosperous man, generous to his friends and charitable toward the poor. But meanwhile the man was in Hades, in torment, seeing the beggar now far above him, in blessedness.

The lesson is that not what one has, but what one is, counts with God. A poor man who loves God and his fellow man and is faithful in all duty is richer by far than the millionaire who never thinks of God nor cares for his fellows.

NOVEMBER 24

Men ought always to pray, and not to faint.—LUKE xviii. 1.

WE are all in danger of growing careless in the matter of prayer. Many people never pray at all. Even many of those who say prayers regularly do not pray. As the flowers and plants on the earth need sunshine and rain from the heavens, so human lives need the benediction of God's love and grace continually.

The special lesson in prayer taught here is earnestness, importunity. We ought always to pray, and not to faint—that is, we should never get discouraged in our praying. Some people, after pleading for something for a long time, give it up just when God is about to send the answer.

It seems strange to have this unjust judge taken as an illustration of God, in any sense, or to have the judge's selfish acts used to show us how we can win blessings from God. But the meaning is, that if an unjust judge can be so influenced by persistent pleading, much more will the kind, loving Father be influenced by the importunate pleadings of His own needy children.

They brought unto Him also infants.—LUKE xviii. 15

DOES Christ care for babies? Some people say no; they are too small for Christ to be interested in them. The disciples seem to have thought almost this, for they tried to keep the mothers from coming to Him with their infants, to get His blessing upon them. But Jesus rebuked the disciples and bade them let the children come.

Francis Xavier once was so weary in his missionary work that he said he must have sleep or he would die. He went to his tent and bade the servant to let nobody disturb him until he could get sleep. Scarcely had the tent door been closed when the attendant saw the monk beckoning to him. Then he said, "I made a mistake. If a little child comes, waken me."

This seems very much like Jesus. He was never so busy or so weary that He would turn away a little child or even keep it waiting. The Christ who loved little children in those days loves them still. He loves also all childlike ones, all who have the spirit of little children.

NOVEMBER 26

He sought to see Jesus.—LUKE xix. 3.

CHARLES WAGNER, in one of his sermons in this country, preached about Zacchæus. First, he said that Zacchæus was so little that he could not see Christ, and had to get up a little higher so that he could look at Him. A good many people are like Zacchæus. They are little and cannot see over people's heads, and must get up higher before they can get a good view of Jesus Christ. They must leave their worldliness, their selfishness, and their sin, so as to get faith's look from higher ground.

The second thing about Zacchæus, Mr. Wagner said, was that he had to come down from his high place before he could receive Christ. There are people also in these days who are too high up and have to get to lower ground before they can take Christ into their hearts and lives. We have to leave our pride, our self-confidence, our self-esteem, our own works, and come in penitence, in humility, in entire dependence upon Christ, before we can take Him into our hearts and know Him as our Saviour and Friend.

NOVEMBER 27

The Lord hath need of him.—LUKE xix. 31.

IT would be well for us if we would learn to hold everything we have at Christ's disposal. When the owner of the colt asked the disciples, "Why loose ye the colt?" they said, "The Lord hath need of him." Then the owner let the beast go.

This is the way we ought to hold all we have. Whenever the Lord needs anything we own, we are to let Him have it. Sometimes He asks for things that are very dear to us, things that it almost breaks our hearts to part with. But we are instantly to let Him take what He will.

When a young Christian girl was about to start for a foreign field as a missionary, a neighbor said to her mother, "I should think it would almost kill you to give up your daughter to go to China." The mother replied quietly: "I gave my daughter to Christ when she was born. I did not know until lately what Christ wanted to do with her. But now that I have learned, I must let Him have His way."

He saw also a certain poor widow casting in thither two mites.—LUKE xxi. 2.

IN our modern days most financial transactions are made in large figures. Men deal in millions, and not in shillings and pence. It seems hardly worth while to give a shilling or half a crown to God, when we read of some other person giving five or ten thousand pounds. But God takes as careful note of the smallest gifts as of the largest. That day in the temple the widow's mite amounted to more in His sight than all the large gifts which the rich men gave. She gave all, and had nothing left; they gave large sums, and had large sums remaining.

God is pleased with the smallest things that are done for Him, if they are done in love and faith. Some one said that Jesus built three monuments when He was on the earth—one for the widow who gave the two mites, one for the man who gave a cup of cold water to another who was thirsty, and the third for the woman who brought the alabaster box, of whom He said, "She hath done what she could."

But there shall not an hair of your head perish.—LUKE xxi. 18.

JESUS spoke of great troubles, persecutions, and trials which should come upon His disciples, but He assured them that in the midst of all these perils they should be safe. Some of them would be delivered up by parents, brethren, kinsfolk, and friends, to endure persecution, and even to suffer death. But He added, "Not an hair of your head shall perish."

It is possible for men to be torn to pieces as to their bodies, and yet not hurt as to their lives. They may suffer the worst kind of physical suffering, but so long as their souls are without sin, they have received no real harm.

There is only one evil in the world—sin. No matter how much we may have to endure, if we are only faithful, nothing can harm us. We should set our way, therefore, in life, not to miss the things that are hard, but in the worst of experiences to be loyal and true to Christ. Then He will shelter us and protect us, so that no evil can befall us.

I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not.— LUKE xxii. 32.

IT ought to give us a new sense of strength to know that Jesus is watching and interceding for us. He had His eye on His disciples that night, and when they were about to pass through sore temptation, He made intercession for the one who was most in danger. Satan asked that he might have all the disciples, but the Master's prayer was for one of them. "Satan asked to have you, that he might sift you as wheat; but I made supplication for thee, Simon."

Weakness makes Christ's solicitude for us more tender, more loving. The harder it is for us to live, the more earnestly does Christ pray for us, and the more powerfully does He help us.

It will do us good always to remember that this little story of Christ's intercession for one of His disciples is a sample of what is going on all the while. He watches from heaven, and when one of us is in danger, lifts up His hands before God and pleads for us.

Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not?—PROVERBS xxiii. 5.

PEOPLE are badly cheated in this world. They imagine that the things they can see are the real things, that gold, lands, and stocks are the true treasures. So they toil for these things and gather them into their possession, piling up what they suppose to be wealth. Thus they live in pomp, with their fine houses, and all their brilliant show. They call themselves millionaires. But one day their supposed riches take to themselves wings and fly away like eagles. Or they may keep their wealth, perchance, and die at last in the midst of it, and have a great funeral; but they find that they cannot carry a penny of it with them. "How much did he leave?" was asked about a rich man who had died. "He left all," was the answer.

If men only knew that there are things which will never fly away, they would no longer live for the wealth that perisheth; they would pass by these glittering unrealities to lay hold of the true riches. He who is rich toward God is the true millionaire.

He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living. —MARK xii. 27.

JESUS is the only Teacher whose words concerning the other world we may safely believe. Other men only speculate: Jesus knows the things He declares. There is impenetrable mystery about the grave. Where are the dead? Is there anything after death? The words of Jesus to the Sadducees seem very plain, and they tell us much that we are eager to know. When He says of the dead that they are "as angels in heaven," He probably has reference only to one matter, that they make up one community, and are not gathered again in separate families, as on earth.

The teaching of Jesus concerning the nature of death itself is far more important. "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." That is, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were not dead, but living that day at the burning bush. Moses and Elijah were living, too, in Christ's own time, for they visited Him on the Transfiguration Mount. So our loved ones who believed in Christ are living just as really as ever they lived.

Go your way into the village: . . . as soon as ye be entered into it, ye shall find a colt tied.—MARK xi. 2.

JESUS always knows what we will find on any road we may take. He knows what each and every to-morrow will be for us. We cannot map out a single day, but He knows all. Our life is not a haphazard thing. The events and incidents of our days are not accidents. They are all foreseen by our Lord, and are part of His plan for us. We meet a stranger. We say we met him by chance; but that chance meeting shapes all our future. Christ knew all about it, and sent us just the way we went. He planned that meeting.

If we understand this it cannot but give confidence to us as we go out day by day into life's unopened paths. We do not know what lies before us—what experiences, duties, obstacles and hindrances, what sorrows and trials; but there is One who sees and knows it all, and He is our Friend and Guide. If we are ready simply to do His will, to follow His instructions, we shall find all prepared for our coming.

But when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto him.—MATT. xii. 2.

THE Pharisees were very close observers of what Jesus did. They went along with Him, not because they loved to be with Him, but as spies upon His conduct. The behavior of good people is watched by unfriendly eyes. Hence we should live most carefully, so as to give no cause for blame. At the same time the example of Christ's disciples here shows us that we are not to be slaves of opinions which have no foundation in the Word of God.

Another lesson is, that we can find better business than playing spy on the lives and conduct of our fellow men. The unfriendly espionage of the Pharisees on the actions of our Lord and His disciples was most mean and contemptible. But it is no less mean and contemptible for us to watch our fellow Christians, just to discover faults in them. Suppose they do not live as they should live; do we have to answer for their conduct? Perhaps our sin of uncharitableness in judging may be as great as the sin in them, which we are so quick to condemn.

DECEMBER 5

Peter, James, and John his brother.—MATT. xvii. 1.

JESUS had His special friendships. All the apostles belonged to His personal family, but there were three who enjoyed closest intimacy with Him. In the Garden of Gethsemane these three were chosen to be nearest to Him, that by their sympathy they might strengthen Him and thus help Him to endure His sore agony.

There must have been something in these three men which fitted them for the place in the inner circle to which they were admitted. It was not mere blind partiality in Jesus that made them His best-beloved. We know that the holiest get nearest to Christ. Faith also brings us near, while doubt and unbelief separate. Purity of heart brings us close—the pure in heart shall see God. Likeness to Christ fits for personal friendship.

Jesus said that those who serve most self-forgetfully are first in His kingdom. Selfishness keeps us far off. It is a comfort to find that Peter, though very faulty, was admitted to closest friendship with Christ.

There appeared unto them Moses and Elijah talking with Him.—MATT. xvii. 3.

FOR about nine hundred years Elijah had been in heaven, and for more than fourteen hundred years Moses had been away from this world, but both reappear here, still living, speaking, and working. There are many proofs of immortality; here is an illustration—we see two men, centuries after they had lived on earth, still alive and busy in God's service. It will be the same with us and our friends—thousands of years after we have vanished from earth we shall still be living and active.

It is interesting to think of the talk which these two men had with Jesus. They were sent to strengthen Him as He set out for His cross. He would have bitter sorrows, and they came to speak their word of cheer. No doubt His heart was stronger because of this visitation. May there not be a hint in this of the kind of employment that shall fill the hands of the redeemed in the other life? Possibly we may be sent to distant worlds, on errands of love, to carry help to weary ones.

Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?—MATT. xviii. 1.

THE Bible does not hide the faults of its saints. It paints them just as they are, blemishes and all. The disciples of Jesus joined in an unseemly scramble for office, thinking their Master was to be a king. There are ambitions and scrambles of the same kind, even among good people, in our own day. Of course it is no excuse for them that Christ's apostles set the example. We ought to be a good deal better than the apostles were, for we have more light, greater privileges and better opportunities.

There is one right way of wishing to be great in Christ's kingdom. It is right for us to long to be great Christians; that is, to have much of the spirit of Christ. One used to pray, "Lord, make me an uncommon Christian." That was right. Paul pressed ever toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God. A hymn gives the prayer of many hearts: "Nearer, my God, to Thee." If it is spiritual greatness we long for, it is a mark of living faith. To be satisfied as we are is a mark of death.

DECEMBER 8

Watch, therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.—MATT. xxiv. 42.

THE command to watch rings out continually in the Bible. We are bidden to watch against temptation, for sin's approaches are insidious. Here, however, the watching is to be in readiness for a stupendous event—the coming of Christ. His coming will be unannounced. The only way, therefore, to be ready when the event occurs, is to be always ready. If there is an hour when we relax our diligence and cease to watch, that may be the hour when He will come.

There is a legend of a man who waited a thousand years before the gates of Paradise, watching for them to open. At last he slept for but one hour. Yet during that hour the gates opened and were closed again, and thus he missed his one opportunity of entering.

The second coming of Christ will be so sudden that no preparation can be made for it after He appears. We must live so that there will not be a moment when we would be ashamed to have Christ come into our place of business and find us as we are.

DECEMBER 9

Jesus held His peace.—MATT. xxvi. 63.

THE striking thing about the trial of Jesus was that His enemies could find nothing against Him. It is worth our while, too, to notice how Jesus answered the calumnies and false witnessings—He was silent to all the charges. It is well we should remember how our Master bore Himself when He was wronged. We should not vex ourselves over unkind treatment from others. It is a great lesson, to learn to be silent under injury. We talk altogether too much. Yet there come times when we must speak, when it would be treason to truth to remain silent. Jesus answered not a word before His accusers, until the high priest adjured Him to say whether He was the Messiah or not. At once He broke silence. We must never be silent when the interests of right and truth demand that we speak.

The saddest thing in all that night to Jesus was the denial by His greatest apostle. We give Him joy by being faithful and true to Him; we grieve Him by every act or word or thought of disloyalty.

Jesus . . . saw much people, and was moved with compassion toward them.—MARK vi. 34.

HE carried the people's sorrows. When He looked upon grief, He felt grief in His own soul. When He looked upon the great throng of people who flocked after Him and saw among them so many suffering ones—lame, sick, blind, palsied—His compassions were stirred. That same compassion exists still in the breast of the risen Lord in glory. He did not lose His tenderness of heart when He was exalted to heaven. "We have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities." It ought to be a great comfort in any sorrow of ours to know that from heaven Jesus looks upon us in deep sympathy, and that His compassions are stirred by every pain and need of ours.

The special thing in this company that so moved Christ was that the people were as sheep not having a shepherd. Many men seem prosperous in our eyes, and yet when Christ looks upon them He is moved with compassion because they know not God.

DECEMBER 11

Then cometh Jesus from Galilee.—MATT. iii. 13.

IT is interesting to think about the thirty silent years which Jesus spent in Galilee. During this time He had been living a quiet life in a lowly home. He had employed all His wondrous power in doing common things. He spoke in the temple about doing the Father's business, and then for eighteen years lived in a humble home doing only the plain, common things of each day.

We need not repine at our limited sphere, nor sigh for more room for our powers, since in a mechanic's occupation, in a peasant home, in an obscure village, the Lord of glory for thirty years found room for his great life.

We should notice, too, that Jesus was in no hurry to enter upon His public ministry. He took plenty of time to prepare for His work. Many young people in these days are in such haste to get into their calling that they can scarcely wait to prepare for it. Years spent in diligent preparation for life are never wasted years.

The heavens were opened unto Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon Him. —MATT. iii. 16.

THIS was God's answer to the consecration of the Messiah. A great many tender thoughts cluster around the dove. It was the dove that the very poor were allowed to bring to the altar as an offering, in place of a more costly sacrifice. The appearance of the dove was a harbinger of coming spring. It was always remembered, too, by the Jews in connection with the abatement of the deluge, when the dove returned to the ark bearing the olive leaf; and the dove has become among all nations an emblem of peace. The dove was referred to by Christ as a sign of gentleness and harmlessness in life.

All these associations made the dove a fitting emblematic form for the Holy Spirit to assume when descending upon Jesus. Jesus came to be a sacrifice for all, even the poorest. He came as the spring comes, bringing life to the dead world. He came bearing a message of peace to every one. And He is like the dove in gentleness and harmlessness.

Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit . . . to be tempted. —MATT. iv. 1.

THIS was just after Christ's anointing for His ministry. He had received the Holy Spirit, and had heard the voice from heaven proclaiming His Messiahship. An old writer says, "All the while our Saviour stayed in His father's shop and meddled only with carpenter's chips, the devil troubled Him not; now that He was to enter more publicly upon His mediatorship, the tempter pierceth His tender soul with many arrows by solicitation to sin."

Temptation was part of Christ's preparation for His ministry. He was not ready to enter upon His work as our Redeemer until He had met and overcome the tempter. We know that He is able to deliver us out of the hands of Satan, because He overcame in His own battles.

Another reason why Jesus was tempted at the beginning of His ministry was that He might understand from personal experience the power of temptation, and thus be prepared to sympathize with us in our temptations.

He was afterward an hungred. . . . The tempter came. —MATT. iv. 2, 3.

THE devil watches for seasonable times. He knows when to bring his temptations to bear upon a man. Everyone has his weak hours, and Satan lies in wait for these hours. He does not tempt us with something we do not want, but with something that will appeal to a craving of our nature. Satan watches, and when he finds us weak and weary, he takes advantage of our condition. Thus he came to Elijah after the strain of Carmel and caused him to flee. He comes to the lonesome and homesick boy, tempting him to seek company that will ruin him.

He adapts his temptations to our special experiences. Jesus was hungry, after His long fasting, and Satan tempted Him to use His divine power to turn stones into bread. Many temptations come to people who are hungry. They are tempted to steal, to be dishonest, or in some way to sell themselves to get bread. We need always to learn to trust the keeping of our souls to Him who has overcome the tempter.

If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.—MATT. iv. 3.

IF Jesus had turned one of the flat stones at His feet into a loaf of bread to break His own fast, would He have sinned? Why would it have been a sin for Him to do this? For one thing, he would then have taken His guidance from Satan, instead of from the Father.

Another reason was, that He was in this world to live as men must live. He was to meet life as we must meet it. If He had continually used His divine power to help Him over the hard points, He would not have understood our life, for we cannot do this. Therefore He never wrought a miracle for Himself to make life easier. It would have been a violation of this law of His life if He had wrought this miracle to feed His hunger.

Then, again, it would have been distrusting His Father. He was under divine care, and God had given Him no command to make bread of the stones. We too must stand where God puts us, and wait for Him to bring help in His own way.

And Jesus . . . saw two brethren . . . casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers.—MATT. iv. 18.

IT is interesting to notice the kinds of persons Christ sought for disciples. He wanted men who could be influenced by Him for good, whom He could train in the ways of His kingdom. It may be noticed, too, that He did not take those who were unemployed: He went among those who were busy in their common work.

Jesus is always looking for men to enter with Him into the work of His kingdom. He does not choose those who are wise in this world's wisdom, for they might not readily accept the wisdom which He teaches. He goes among those who are simple-hearted, open-hearted, warm-hearted, and who are busy at their duty of the day. God found a king for Israel in a boy keeping sheep. He found a prophet to succeed Elijah in a young man ploughing in the field.

If we would be chosen to take a part in Christ's work, we must seek to be ready for it, with warm heart, mind open to receive truth, and ready for any service to which God may call us.

For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men.—MATT. vi. 5.

THEY do not pray to God at all, and their aim is not to receive blessings in answer, but to have men think that they are devout. They have their reward—that is, they get what they pray for: men see them.

We need to guard against an expression of our religion for men's eyes, and not for God's. It were better if we gave our gifts without any thought of praise or commendation, simply for the sake of Christ, and for the helping of others.

We should train ourselves to do our good deeds without seeking praise. Florence Nightingale, having gone like an angel of mercy among the hospitals in the Crimea, until her name was enshrined deep in every soldier's heart, asked to be excused from having her picture taken, as thousands begged her to do, that she might drop out and be forgotten, and that Christ alone might be remembered as the Author of the blessings which her hand had distributed in His name.

Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought.—MATT. vi. 25.

ONE does not meet many whose faces shine always with the light of a perfect peace. Is worrying a sin, or is it only an infirmity? There certainly are many warnings in the Bible against it. Isaiah gives the secret of an unanxious life: "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee." Paul exhorts against worrying, and tells us how to keep it out of our life: "In nothing be anxious." But how can we obey this counsel? The answer is: "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." Instead of worrying about matters, we are to put them out of our hands into God's by prayer. Then "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus." Peter puts the lesson in this way: "Casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He careth for you." This is a lesson which we are to learn, and which we are to strive to live out in our common days.

Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.—MATT. vi. 33.

WE are to put all our energy into one effort—to do God's will. We are not to be anxious about raiment or food—that is God's matter. We are to take thought, however, about our duty, the filling of our place in the world. Too many people worry far more about food and raiment, lest they shall be left to want, than about doing the will of God. That is, they are more anxious about God's part in their life than about their own. They fear that God may not take care of them, but they do not fear that they may fail in faithfulness.

We should learn once for all that providing for our wants is God's matter, not ours; and that our only care should be our duty. This God will never do for us, but if we are true to Him we shall never have any occasion to fret about our care. Suppose we are starving? Well, we must continue doing our duty in the circumstances, and not worrying; and in due time the Lord will provide.

He saw a man . . . sitting at the receipt of custom.—MATT. ix. 9.

THE men who collected the toll were a low class of Jews. As a rule they were dishonest, extortioners, men who robbed the people by overtaxing them. As Jesus passed this booth by the seaside, that day, he looked in and saw the very man he wanted. It was not the publican, as he then was, that attracted Jesus, but the man who would emerge under the influence of divine love. As Michael Angelo saw his wondrous statue of the young David in the soiled and castaway block of marble, so Jesus saw in the outcast Levi the apostle whose name is now so honored.

"Each human soul is like a cavern full of gems. The casual observer glances into it through some cranny, and all looks dark and sullen. But let light enter it, lift a torch up to the walls, let God's sunlight fall into it and flood its open recesses, and lo! it will flash with crystals and with amethysts, and each separate crystal will quiver under the touch of brightness with a transporting discovery of its own nature."

Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them?—MATT. ix. 15.

CHRISTIANITY is a religion of sincerity, and not of empty forms. The Jews had drifted away from spiritual religion, and in consequence had multiplied meaningless ceremonies. They may have been in the midst of joy and gladness, but when the prescribed hour for fasting came they put on their sackcloth and other marks of sorrow, began to wear sad looks, and entered upon the set period of mourning. Such a practice led to insincerity. Ofttimes it was an utterly false expression of the inner life.

Jesus struck a blow at this hollowness, and refused to conform to it. Fasting is a symbol of mourning, of sorrow; to go through the form of fasting, therefore, when the heart is joyous, is only a farce. When there is an occasion for mourning, let there be mourning, but not otherwise. That is, Jesus teaches that our religion must always be sincere, never affected or hypocritical. He condemns as sacrilegious all overexpressions of religious emotion or feeling.

Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the publican.—MATT. x. 3.

IT is remarkable how little we know about most of the apostles. Peter, James, and John, we know quite well. Matthew we know by the Gospel he wrote. Thomas we remember by his doubts. James, the son of Alphæus, wrote an epistle. Another Judas, not Iscariot, left us a little letter. Of the rest we know almost nothing but their names.

No doubt one reason why no more is told about the apostles is that the Bible magnifies only one name. The Gospels were written to hold up Christ before the world. We need not trouble ourselves about the obscurity of great men. Earth keeps scant records of its benefactors, but there is a place where every smallest kindness done in the name of Christ is recorded and remembered. The stories of the obscure apostles and of the beautiful lives which have wrought for God and for man have vanished, but are recorded indelibly before God. Their memorials are in other lives, and some day every touch and impression will be revealed.

Then began He to upbraid the cities wherein most of His mighty works were done, because they repented not.—MATT. xi. 20.

EVEN Christ's work sometimes seemed to fail of results. We should not then be cast down if sometimes our work does not appear to yield any results. It may be no fault of ours that there is no harvest. It certainly was no fault of Jesus if His work was not always successful.

There is something else in these words: mercy rejected is changed to judgment. Jesus had long poured out His grace upon these cities. He had lived among the people; they knew His life. He had wrought miracles of healing before their eyes and spoken words of truth in their ears. But they had rejected all His teachings and shut their hearts against His love. So now He upbraids them. Even Christ's denunciations are full of tears. Yet we must not think that He was incapable of severity. He whose love glowed in such infinite tenderness on the cross will sit on the throne of judgment and His presence will smite terror into the hearts of all His enemies.

They were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord.—LUKE i. 6.

IT is a beautiful thing that we read of this good old couple, Zacharias and Elisabeth, that they were righteous before God. Some people appear to men to be righteous, who before God have no such record. Real character is what our hearts are, our hearts make us. We ought not to be satisfied with doing well the things which men can see; we ought to work and live ever for God's eye. Sometimes we say it is no matter how we do certain things, because nobody will see them. But we should remember that God will see them, and surely we should never do careless, faulty work for His eye.

The word "commandments" suggests that the holiness of these people was of a very practical kind. Some people's religion is chiefly emotional. They talk about loving God, but they pay little heed to the commandments. God is pleased with ardent devotions, but He wants us to prove our religion by obediences, by doing the things He gives us to do.

DECEMBER 25

On earth peace.—LUKE ii. 14.

THERE is a beautiful verse in one of the old prophets which says: "I know the thoughts which I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil." All God's thoughts toward us are thoughts of peace. Even in our sins His thoughts are only of love. He does not desire the sinner's death, but that he would repent and live.

The coming of Christ to live, suffer, and die for our redemption was one of God's thoughts of peace, the most wonderful of them all. It showed how much God loves us, what He was willing to do to make peace for us. Christ first made peace for us by bearing our sins. From the cross went forth the proclamation, offering peace to all who would accept it. Jesus said: "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you." Then Paul says: "The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus." So, everywhere the gospel goes, with its message of peace to them that are afar off and to them that are nigh.

DECEMBER 26

The shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethelehem, and see this thing.—LUKE ii. 15.

HERE we see the simple faith of these shepherds. They raised no doubt, asked no questions, expressed no feeling of uncertainty. They had the faith of little children. They did not say, "Let us go and see if this thing is true;" but, "Let us go and see this thing." We are too apt to doubt, and to ask for more proof. It is better for us to believe without questioning, and then to go at once to find and see what the Word of God promises.

The shepherds were so sure that they should find the Babe lying in a manger that they at once hurried away into the town to begin their search. It would be well for us if we had faith as simple and as earnest. In the next verse we read: "They came with haste, and found both Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger." In like manner whatever the divine promise may be, if we believe it and hasten to seek the promised blessing, we shall find it just as the Word of God says we shall.

He went down with them, . . . and was subject unto them.—LUKE ii. 51.

JESUS went back to Nazareth, where He remained obeying His parents, and proving in all ways dutiful, reverent, and helpful. He found childhood in a lowly home a large place enough for His divine life.

Browning represents Gabriel taking the place of a poor boy and working for him at his lowly trade, as content as if he was engaged in the highest service. But here is something sublimer than even the poet's fancy. Should any child, however great his gifts, consider the child-place in a home unworthy, since the Son of God found the Father's business for so many years in such a humble home? "A life spent in brushing clothes and washing crockery and sweeping floors—a life which the proud of the earth would treat as the dust under their feet—a life spent at the clerk's desk, a life spent in the narrow shop, a life spent in the laborer's hut, may yet be a life so ennobled by God's loving mercy that for the sake of it a king might gladly yield his crown."

DECEMBER 28

That put far away the evil day.—Amos vi. 3.

WE are taught not to borrow trouble. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." It is not right for us to look forward, imagining troubles that may come to us after a while, or even forecasting trials which we must meet by and by. The true Christian way of living is to do the duty of the present day faithfully and well, leaving all the issues in God's hands.

But if a man has a note of a thousand dollars to meet on a certain day, it will not do for him to put off all thought about the matter until the day comes to find him unprepared. He must get ready to pay the note when it falls due. We must lay up in summer days, when harvests are golden, for winter days, when it will not be possible for us to gather food. We must prepare for the days of old age by activity, diligence, economy, and carefulness in the days of early manhood. We must prepare for the day of judgment by living in such a way that when we stand before Christ we shall not be afraid.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.—PROVERBS i. 7.

YOU may set down six ciphers—000,000—and they count for nothing; but if you put a five or any figure before them, they all count—5,000,000. Human knowledge alone only adds up a row of ciphers. A young man goes through the university and then passes through his medical or law school and is graduated with honors, a learned man, but not yet a Christian. His acquirements make only a long row of ciphers. These will be elements of power if he only gets in before them something that counts. Then he gives himself to Christ, consecrates all his attainments to Him, and every one of his acquirements assumes a high value. He has written a figure before the row of ciphers, and 000,000,000 has become 6,000,000,000.

The more a man knows, the more of a man he is, if he loves, reverences, and obeys God. But this is the first thing in all true wisdom. Not to have it, is to make failure out of life; and the greater the other acquirements the greater the failure.

DECEMBER 30

My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord.—PROVERBS iii. 11.

THE Bible always talks to us as children. It comes with a Father's authority, and also a Father's gentleness. It is hard, however, not to despise chastening. Of course, it is not possible that we should really find pleasure in being chastened. That is not natural. Indeed the Bible says, "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous." Not even the grace of God in our hearts can take the sting out of chastening. We are not expected then to like it. But we are told not to "despise" it. That is, we are to accept it without murmuring.

It will help us to receive chastening meekly, in faith and love, if we remember that it is "of the Lord." He sends it. We know that He loves us with infinite affection. He would not take pleasure therefore in causing us pain, nor would He do it at all, were it not in some way for our good. It is because He loves us and would do us good that He sends or permits the suffering.

DECEMBER 31

So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.—PSALM XC. 12.

THE last day of a year should make us thoughtful. We cannot but ask whether we have been faithful, whether we have done all our duty, and whether we have learned the lessons set for us during the year. There is none who has not come short, and who has left no duty undone. There is none who has left no white page blotted.

One purpose of life is that we may grow, that in all the experiences of our days we may be learning new lessons and becoming better. Growth of the body is not all, nor is growth in knowledge the test of living. One may be physically stronger and yet be no better in character. One may know a great deal more and yet be no wiser. We are growing only when the peace of our heart is becoming deeper, when we love more and are gentler, sweeter, and more unselfish. We shall want to make this last day of the year very beautiful—beautiful enough to be the last of our life. We should leave no duty undone when its last hour strikes.